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# ARMY OF SHADOWS





# ARMY OF SHADOWS

*by*

*Joseph Kessel*

*Translated from the French by*  
HAAKON CHEVALIER

LONDON  
CRESSET PRESS

1944

*First published October 1944 by  
The Cresset Press Ltd. 11 Fitzroy Square London W.1  
printed by the Shenval Press London and Hertford  
Reprinted February 1945*

*This book is published in complete  
conformity with the authorised economy standards*

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## Preface

**T**here is no propaganda in this book and there is no fiction. No detail has been forced, and none has been invented. The reader will find collected here—without formality and sometimes even at random—only facts that have been experienced, verified, and that one might almost say are of daily occurrence: commonplace facts of present-day French life.

The sources of these studies are numerous and reliable. For the characters, the situations, the most naked suffering and the simplest courage the author had a tragic superabundance of material to draw from. Under these conditions the task promised to be an extremely easy one.

Yet of all the works that I have had occasion to write in the course of a long life none has cost me so great an effort as *Army of Shadows*. And none has left me so dissatisfied.

There was so much that I wanted to say, and I have said so little. . . .

Reasons of security naturally formed the first obstacle. He who would write about the French Resistance without romanticism and without even drawing upon the imagination is chained by his civic responsibilities. It is not that a novel or a poem is less true, less vivid than an account of authentic happenings. I rather believe the contrary. But we are living in the midst of horror, surrounded by bloodshed. I have felt neither the right nor the strength to go beyond the simplicity of the chronicle, the humility of the document.

Therefore everything had to be accurate, and at the same time nothing must be recognisable. Because of the enemy, his spies, his lackeys, it was necessary to disguise the faces, to uproot the persons and plant them elsewhere; to shuffle the episodes, suppress the sources, separate the links, conceal the secrets of attack and defence.

It was possible to speak freely only of the dead (when they had neither family nor friends who were menaced) or to relate stories

which are so familiar in France that they tell no one back there anything new.

"Are the traces sufficiently blurred, jumbled, obliterated? Is not someone going to recognise this man or that woman—a face, a gait, a shadow?" This fear has arrested, suspended or unsteadied my hand again and again. And when the fear was allayed, when I thought I had taken every precaution, another anguish arose. I would begin to wonder, "Am I still on the path of truth? Have I found fair equivalents into which to transpose the habits, the professions, the relations of feelings?" For an act has by no means the same meaning if it is performed by a rich or a poor man, by a bachelor or a father of six, by an old man or a young girl.

And when I thought I had approximately succeeded in this substitution, I was overcome by a great sadness: nothing remained of the man, of the woman whom I loved, whom I admired, whose life or death I should have liked to relate under the name, under the face that had existed. Then I would try at least to convey the timbre of a laugh, the quality of a glance or the whisper of a voice.

Such was the first, the obvious difficulty, which might be said to be of a material kind. But obvious and material obstacles are never the hardest to surmount.

I was haunted by a torment of a different kind during the writing of these pages. It had nothing to do with reasons of security. It was personal, but so intense that more than once I was on the point of abandoning the task. In order to go on I had constantly to tell myself, "Something has to be told of the French Resistance, even if it is badly told." For, without any false modesty, I have constantly felt my inferiority, my inadequacy as a writer in the presence of what constitutes the essence of this book, in the presence of the image and the spirit of the great, wonderful mystery which is the French Resistance.

Is there a writer who, in trying to describe a landscape, a light, a character or a destiny has not felt an attack of despair, who has not felt that he was being unfaithful to the colours of nature, to the essence of light, either beneath or above the plot spun by fate? Imagine, then, what it is to give the story of France—an obscure, secret France, new to her friends, her enemies and above all new to herself! France no longer has bread, wine, fire. But above all she no longer has any law. Civil disobedience, individual or organised rebellion, have become

*duties to the fatherland. The national hero is the under-cover man, the outlaw. He changes his domicile every week, every night. He lives under false names, false addresses, false faces. Officials, members of the police help the rebel. He finds accomplices even in the ministries. He violates regulations without giving it a thought. Prisons, executions, tortures, criminal attempts, surprise raids, flying bullets. . . . People die and kill with naturalness.*

*On the surface Vichy continues to play at being a government. But the living France is all in the depths. It is toward the darkness that its true and unknown face is turned. In the catacombs of revolt the people are creating their light and finding their own law.*

*Where are these lovable, easygoing Frenchmen, so satisfied with the products of their land and so civilised that they seem to be already embalmed in their pleasures and their delicate arts? They crowd the prisons, the concentration camps, they form lines before the firing squads, they let themselves be torn to pieces rather than yield, bow or speak.*

*And the innumerable women of all classes, of all ages, those women who were considered the most frivolous in the world and who compel the admiration of their executioners, the women liaison agents, the organisers of escapes, of executions, of raids!*

*Never has France waged a more exalted, a nobler war than that of the caves in which the free newspapers are printed, of the terrains and the coves where she receives her free friends and from which her free children set out, of the torture cells where in spite of tongs, red-hot pins and crushed bones the martyrs maintain the silence of free men.*

*And I know that it has not been given to me to describe as it needed to be described that unique state of grace, that passage of a whole people into subterranean purity, like the invisible springs that filter through the flank of a hill. . . .*

*Everything in these pages is true. Everything has been lived by men and women in France.*

*It was my good fortune to have in France as friends men like Gerbier, Lemasque or Felix la Tonsure. But it was in London that I was able to see the French Resistance in its most vivid light. This is not so surprising as it may seem. For the obligation of secrecy, the fact of being hunted quarry, make all encounters on the native soil*

*difficult and precarious. In London one can meet and talk freely. In London all the surviving leaders of the Resistance turn up sooner or later. And this extraordinary coming-and-going between France and England appears quite natural here. London is the crossroad of the strangest destinies of France.*

*So it was that I dined with "Saint Luc." So also, on a spring evening, framed by the great bay windows of a Chelsea drawing room, I talked with three men who had been sentenced to death, who smiled as they looked out on the trees in the garden and who were going back to France to resume command of their group and turn into shadows once more. . . .*

*It has not been my foolish ambition to give a full-scale picture of the Resistance. All I have been able to do has been to lift one corner of the veil and afford a glimpse of the throbbing life and the suffering in the midst of the battle.*

JOSEPH KESSEL.

*London, Kinnerton Studio.*

*September 8, 1943.*





## *The Escape*

It was raining. The police-van slowly picked its way up and down the grades of the slippery road that followed the curves of the hills. Gerbier was alone in the interior of the car with a gendarme. Another gendarme was driving. The one who was guarding Gerbier had peasant cheeks and a rather strong body odour.

As the car turned into a side road, the gendarme observed, "We're making a little detour, but I suppose you're not in any hurry."

"No, I'm really not," said Gerbier with a brief smile.

The police-van stopped before an isolated farm. Through the grilled opening Gerbier could see only a bit of sky and field. He heard the driver leave his seat.

"It's not going to take long," said the gendarme. "My partner is going to get a few provisions. Have to do the best you can in these wretched times."

"That's perfectly natural," said Gerbier.

The gendarme took in his prisoner and shook his head. This man was well dressed and he had a straightforward way of speaking, a pleasant face. What wretched times. . . . He wasn't the first one he was embarrassed to see wearing handcuffs.

"You won't be too badly off in that camp!" said the gendarme. "I'm not talking about the food, of course. Before the war the dogs wouldn't have touched it. But aside from that it's the best concentration camp in France, I've been told. It's the German camp."

"I don't quite follow you," said Gerbier.

"During the phony war I guess we were expecting to take a lot of prisoners," the gendarme explained. "A big centre was set up for them in this part of the country. Naturally not a single one came. But to-day it comes in handy."

"A real stroke of luck, you might say," Gerbier suggested.

"You said it Monsieur, you said it!" the gendarme exclaimed.

The driver climbed back into his seat. The police-van started off again. The rain continued to pour down on the Limousin countryside.

## II

Gerbier, his hands free, but standing, was waiting for the camp commander to address him. The camp commander was reading Gerbier's dossier. From time to time he would dig the thumb of his left hand into the hollow of his cheek and slowly withdraw it. The fat, soft and unhealthy flesh would keep the white imprint for a few seconds and swell again with difficulty like an old rubber ball that has lost its elasticity. This movement marked the tempo of the commander's reflections.

"The same old story," he thought to himself. "We no longer know whom we get, nor how to treat them."

He sighed as he remembered pre-war days, when he was a prison warden. All you had to worry about then was getting your percentage of profit on the food. The rest presented no difficulties. The prisoners of their own accord fell into known categories and for each category there was a corresponding rule of conduct. Now, on the contrary, you could get as big a cut as you wanted on the camp rations (no one concerned himself about it), but it was a headache to sort the people. Those who came without trial, without sentence, remained locked up indefinitely. Others, with a terrible record, would get out very quickly and regain influence in the department, the regional prefecture, in fact even in Vichy.

The commander did not look at Gerbier. He had given up trying to form an opinion from faces and clothes. He was trying to read between the lines of the police notes which the gendarmes had handed him at the same time that they had delivered the prisoner.

"An independent character, a quick mind; a distant and ironic attitude," the commander read. And he translated, "Break him." Then, "Distinguished bridge and highway engineer," and with his thumb in his cheek the commander would say to himself, "Spare him."

"Suspected of De Gaullist activities." "Break him, break him."

But immediately after, "Freed for lack of evidence." "Influence, influence," the commander would say to himself, "Spare him."

The commander's thumb sank deeper into the adipose flesh. It seemed to Gerbier that the cheek would never come back to its normal level. However, the œdema disappeared little by little. Then the commander declared with a certain solemnity,

"I'm going to put you in a building that was intended for German officers."

"I appreciate the honour," said Gerbier.

For the first time the commander looked up, with the vague and heavy gaze of a man who eats too much, at the face of his new prisoner.

The latter was smiling, or rather half smiling—his lips were thin and contracted.

"Spare him, yes," the camp commander thought to himself, "but keep an eye on him."

### III

The storekeeper gave Gerbier some wooden shoes and a fatigue suit of red homespun.

"This was intended," he began, "for the . . ."

"German prisoners—I know," said Gerbier.

He took off his clothes and slipped on the fatigue suit. Then on the doorstep of the shop he let his eyes roam across the camp. It was a level, grassy plateau around which undulations of uninhabited terrain rose and fell. A drizzle still fell from the low sky. Evening was coming on. The barbed-wire networks and the patrol road that separated them were already harshly lighted by searchlights. But the buildings of different sizes scattered over the plateau remained dark. Gerbier headed for one of the smallest of these.

### IV

The cabin sheltered five red fatigue suits.

The colonel, the pharmacist and the travelling salesman, sitting with their legs crossed near the door, were playing dominoes with pieces of cardboard on the back of a mess-tin. The other two

prisoners were in the back of the cabin, talking in low voices.

Armél was stretched out on his straw bed, wrapped in the single blanket issued to internees. Legrain had spread his own over it, but this did not prevent Armél from shivering. He had lost a good deal more blood in the course of the afternoon. His blonde hair was matted with the sweat of fever. His fleshless face wore an expression of rather qualified, but unalterable gentleness.

"I assure you, Roger, I assure you that if you only had faith you wouldn't be unhappy because you would no longer be in a state of revolt," Armél murmured.

"But I want to be, I want to," said Legrain.

He clenched his thin fists and a kind of wheeze issued from his collapsed chest. He resumed angrily,

"You came here, you were twenty, and I was seventeen. We were healthy, we hadn't done anybody any harm, all we asked was to be let alone. Look at us to-day. And everything that's going on all around! I just can't understand that this exists and that there can be a God."

Armél had shut his eyes. His features seemed to have been worn away by an inner torment and by the growing darkness.

"It's only with God that everything becomes comprehensible," he answered.

Armél and Legrain were among the first internees of the camp. And Legrain had no other friend in the world. He would have done anything to bring rest to that bloodless and angelic face. It inspired him with a tenderness, a pity that were the only bonds that linked him to mankind. But there was in him an even stronger, an inflexible feeling—which prevented him from falling in with Armél's murmured plea.

"I can't believe in God," he said. "It's too convenient for those sons of bitches, to pay up in the next world. I want to see justice on this earth. I want . . ."

The stir in the doorway caused Legrain to break off. A new red fatigue suit had just come in.

"My name is Philippe Gerbier," said the new arrival.

Colonel Jarret du Plessis, Aubert the pharmacist and Octave Bonnafous, the travelling salesman, introduced themselves each in turn.

"I don't know, Monsieur, what brings you here," said the colonel.

"Neither do I," said Gerbier half smiling.

"But I want you to know right away why I was interned," the colonel continued. "I made the statement, in a café, that Admiral Darlan was a scoundrel. Yes."

The colonel made a rather emphatic pause, and continued emphatically,

"To-day I add that Marshal Pétain is another scoundrel who lets soldiers be bullied by sailors!"

"At least, colonel, you're suffering for an idea!" the travelling salesman exclaimed. "But I was simply going about my business, crossing a square where there was a De Gaullist demonstration . . ."

"And I," broke in Aubert, the pharmacist, "with me it's even worse."

He turned abruptly to Gerbier.

"Do you know what a Malher shell is?" he asked.

"No," said Gerbier.

"That general ignorance is what killed me," Aubert went on. "The Malher shell, Monsieur, is a container in the shape of a pointed cylinder for producing chemical reactions under pressure. I am an expert chemist, Monsieur. I couldn't help having a Malher shell, after all. I was reported for illegal possession of a shell. I have never been able to obtain a hearing from the authorities."

"There is no longer any authority, there are only scoundrels. Yes!" said the colonel. "They've cut off my pension. . . ."

Gerbier realised that he would hear these stories a hundred times. With extreme politeness, he asked which was the place he was to occupy in the cabin. The colonel, who did duty as barracks-officer, pointed to a free straw bed at the back. In bringing his valise over to it Gerbier approached his other companions. He held out his hand to Legrain, who gave his name and said,

"Communist."

"Already?" asked Gerbier.

Legrain turned a deep red.

"I was too young to have my party card, that's true," he hurriedly explained, "but it's all the same thing. I was arrested with my father and other militants. They were sent to some other place. It seems that life was too easy for them here. I asked to go with them, but the bastards wouldn't let me."

"How long ago was that?" Gerbier then asked.

"Just after the armistice."

"That makes almost a year," said Gerbier.

"I'm the oldest in the camp," said Roger Legrain.

"The longest," Gerbier corrected, smiling.

"Next to me it's Armel," Legrain went on, ". . . the young school teacher who's lying down."

"Is he asleep?" Gerbier asked.

"No, he's very sick," Legrain murmured. "A rotten dysentery."

"What about the infirmary?" asked Gerbier.

"No room," said Legrain.

At their feet a soft, listless voice spoke.

"Any place is good enough to die in."

"Why are you here?" Gerbier asked, leaning over Armel.

"I gave notice that I would never be able to teach children hatred of the Jews and the English," said the school teacher, without having the strength to open his eyes.

Gerbier got up again. He showed no emotion. Only his lips had turned a slightly darker colour.

Gerbier put his valise at the head of the straw bed assigned to him. The cabin was completely devoid of furniture and accessories, except for the inevitable soil-tub in the middle.

"There was everything that was needed for the German officers, who never came," said the colonel. "But the warden and the guards helped themselves, and the rest went to the black market."

"Do you play dominoes?" the pharmacist asked Gerbier.

"No, sorry," the latter answered.

"We can teach you," the travelling salesman suggested.

"Thanks, but I really haven't any aptitude for it," said Gerbier.

"Then you will excuse us?" exclaimed the colonel. "There is just time for a game before it gets dark."

Night fell. Roll was called. The doors were shut. There was no light in the cabin. Legrain's breathing was wheezy and oppressed. In his corner the little school teacher moaned softly. Gerbier reflected, "The camp commander isn't so dumb. He stuffs me away between three imbeciles and two lost children."

## V

The following day when Roger Legrain stepped out of the cabin it was raining. In spite of this and in spite of the chill in the

April morning air on a plateau exposed to all the winds Gerbier, naked in his clogs and wearing a towel tied round his middle, was doing setting-up exercises. His body was flat-coloured, of a dry and hard consistence. His muscles were not visible, but their even, compact play gave the feeling of a block not easily dented. Legrain considered these movements with melancholy. Merely breathing deeply made his lungs whistle like a hollow bladder.

"Already out walking!" Gerbier shouted between exercises.

"I'm going to the camp power-plant," said Legrain. "I work there."

Gerbier completed a body bend and went over to Legrain.

"A good job?" he asked.

A bright flush came into Legrain's hollow cheeks. This tendency to blush occasionally was the only trace of his extreme youth. For the rest, privations, confinement and above all the constant wear and tear of a weighty, obsessing inner revolt had matured his face and his behaviour frightfully.

"I don't even get a crust of bread for my work," said Legrain. "But it's a job I like and I don't want to lose the knack. That's all there is to it."

Gerbier's nose was very slender at the bridge. Because of this his eyes seemed very close together. When Gerbier looked at someone attentively, as he was looking at Legrain at this moment, his eternal half-smile became set in a severe fold and it was as though his eyes dissolved in a single black fire. As Gerbier remained silent, Legrain pivoted on his clogs. Gerbier said softly,

"Good-bye, comrade."

Legrain wheeled round and faced him as suddenly as though he had been burned.

"You are . . . you are . . . a communist," he stammered.

"No, I'm not a communist," said Gerbier.

He allowed a second to pass and added with a smile,

"But that doesn't prevent me from having comrades."

Gerbier tightened his towel round his waist and resumed his exercises. Legrain's red fatigue clothes were slowly blotted out on the rain-swept plateau.



## VI

In the afternoon, the sky having cleared a little, Gerbier made the round of the camp. It took him several hours. The plateau was immense and was occupied entirely by the prisoners' city. One could see that it had grown haphazardly and piecemeal, as Vichy's orders progressively drained the ever-growing population of captives to this elevated stretch of bare ground. In the centre rose the original nucleus that had been built for the German prisoners. Its buildings were decent and substantial. The penitentiary administration offices were set up in the best of these. All around, shacks built of wooden boards, corrugated iron, tar-paper, spread as far as the eye could see. It looked like the slums that hedge great cities. More and more, and still more room had been needed.

Room for foreigners. For traffickers. For Freemasons. For Kabyles. For those who were opposed to the Legion. For Jews. For refractory peasants. For vagrants. For former convicts. For political suspects. For those whose intents were suspect. For those who embarrassed the government. For those whose influence over the people was feared. For those who had been accused without proof. For those who had served their sentence but whom the authorities did not want to set free. For those whom the judges refused to sentence, to try, and who were being punished for their innocence. . . .

Here were hundreds of men taken from their families, from their work, from their town, from their truth, and herded into camps on the mere decision of an official or a ministry for an indefinite period of time, like wreckage thrown up on a muddy beach beyond the reach of the tides.

To keep these men whose legions augmented day by day, other men had been needed, who also grew more and more numerous. They had been recruited by chance, in haste, among the lowest elements of the unemployed, the incompetent, the alcoholics, the degenerates. Their only uniform, worn with their wretched clothes, was a beret and an armband. They were very badly paid. These outcasts suddenly found themselves with power. They displayed more ferocity than professional brutes. They made money out of everything: out of the famine rations which they managed

to cut by half, the tobacco, the soap, the basic toilet articles which they resold at monstrous prices. Corruption was the only thing that had any effect on these guards.

During his walk Gerbier thus was able to win over two purveyors. He also exchanged a few words with some prisoners lying in front of their shacks. He had the feeling of approaching a kind of mould, of reddish mushrooms in human form. These undernourished people, flapping and shivering in their fatigue suits, at loose ends, unshaved, unwashed, had vacant, roaming eyes, limp mouths that had lost their elasticity. Gerbier reflected that this laxness was quite natural. Real rebels, when they were caught, were usually kept in deep, voiceless prisons, or handed over to the Gestapo. There were no doubt, even in this camp, a few resolute men who did not give way to the rotting process. But it would take time to discover them in the midst of this immense flock broken by adversity. Gerbier remembered Roger Legrain, his exhausted but inflexible features, his courageous emaciated shoulders. Yet it was he who had spent the greatest number of months in this humus-bin. Gerbier made for the power station which was located among the central group of buildings, known in the camp as the German quarter.

As he neared it Gerbier ran into a file of skeleton-like Kabyles pushing wheelbarrows loaded with garbage-cans. They moved very slowly. Their wrists seemed to be on the point of breaking. Their heads were too heavy for their bony necks. One of them stumbled and his wheelbarrow tipped, upsetting the garbage-can. Peelings, sordid remnants scattered on the ground. Before Gerbier knew what was happening he saw a kind of mute, frantic pack throw itself on the offals. Then he saw another pack come running. The guards began to strike about with their fists, their feet, bludgeons, black-jacks. At first they struck out of duty, to bring back order. But before long they began to enjoy it, to be carried away as by a kind of intoxication. They would aim at the man's fragile and vulnerable areas—in the middle, in the small of the back, the liver, the sexual parts. They relinquished their victim only when he had become inanimate.

Gerbier suddenly heard Legrain's muffled, wheezing voice.

"It drives me mad," the young man said. "It drives me mad to think that we went and got those wretches in Africa and took

them from their homes. They were told about France, beautiful France, and about the Marshal, the grand old man. They were promised ten francs a day. At the yards they only got half of that. They asked why. Then they were sent here. They croak like flies. And when they haven't had time to croak, this is what happens. . . ."

Out of breath, Legrain began to cough a long, hollow cough. "All debts will be paid," said Gerbier.

At this moment his half-smile assumed an extreme sharpness. Most people experienced a feeling of uneasiness when this expression passed over Gerbier's features. But it inspired Legrain with great confidence.

## VII

Toward mid-May fine weather set in for good. The late spring burst all at once in full splendour. Thousands of tiny flowers sprang up in the field of grass. The prisoners began to take sun-baths. The sharp hip-bones, the prominent ribs, the limp skins, the arms reduced to the form of the bones, rested among the fresh flowers. Gerbier who paced the plateau all day long would ceaselessly run into this hospital humanity stunned by spring. No one could have told whether his feeling for them was one of disgust or pity or indifference. He himself did not know. But when, at the noon-hour, he discovered Legrain exposing himself like the rest he hurried over to him.

"Don't do that, cover yourself right away," he said. As Legrain did not obey, Gerbier threw a fatigue jacket over the young man's pitiful torso.

"I hear you breathing and coughing in your sleep," said Gerbier. "You've surely got something wrong with your lungs. The sun is very dangerous for you."

Gerbier had never shown a greater interest in Legrain than in the pharmacist or his other cabin-mates.

"You don't look like a doctor," said Legrain with astonishment.

"And I'm not," said Gerbier. "but I once directed the construction of a power line in Savoy. There were some establishments there for tuberculars, I used to talk with the doctors."

Legrain's eyes had lighted up.

"You're an electrician !" he exclaimed.

"Like yourself," said Gerbier jovially.

"Oh no! I can see that you're a *Monsieur* in the game," said Legrain. "But we might talk shop just the same."

Legrain was afraid he was being indiscreet and added,

"From time to time."

"Right away, if you like," said Gerbier.

He lay down beside Legrain and while chewing grass-blades and flower-stems listened to the young man talk about the generating set, the voltage, the light and power mains.

"Would you like me to take you there?" Legrain asked at last.

Gerbier was shown a station that was rather primitive, but run with knowledge and taste. Gerbier likewise saw Legrain's assistant. He was an old Austrian engineer of Jewish origin. He must have fled from Vienna to Prague and from Prague to France. He was very timid. He tried to make himself as small as possible. After so many adversities and fears he seemed satisfied with his fate.

## VIII

The estimate Gerbier had formed of this man enabled him to understand the full significance of a scene that took place some time after this.

A Gestapo car stopped before the entrance to the concentration camp. The gates were swung open. A few guards with berets and armbands jumped up on the running-boards and the grey car drove slowly in the direction of the German quarter. When it got close to the electrical plant an S.S. officer stepped out and signalled to the guards to follow him inside the building. It was sun-bathing time. Many of the prisoners gathered round the car. The uniformed driver was smoking a cigar and was blowing the smoke through the nostrils of his broad, turned-up nose. He did not look at the hedge of bony, half-naked and silent men. In the midst of this silence there was a cry—then another, and again another. Now they were strung together into a single lamentation, which was close to an animal wail. The half-naked men gave a start of panic. But the fascination of horror was stronger in them than fear. They waited. The guards appeared, dragging a white-haired man from the building. The old engineer was struggling,

still shrieking. Suddenly he caught sight of the hedge of men, half-naked, silent and pale. He began to utter broken words. Only a few phrases were distinguishable: "French soil . . . French government . . . free zone . . ."

Gerbier, who at first had kept at a distance from the spectators, did not notice that he was drawing close to them, that he was edging his way through the last row, edging his way through the next, that he was reaching the first, that he was still advancing. A trembling, warm hand alighted on his wrist. Gerbier's body all at once relaxed and his eyes lost their expression of morbid fixity.

"Thank you," he said to Legrain.

Gerbier took a deep breath. After which, with a kind of avid detestation, he watched the guards throw the old engineer into the car and the driver continue to blow rings of smoke through his wide nostrils.

"Thank you," Gerbier said again.

He smiled to Legrain with that half-smile in which the eyes had no share.

The same evening, in the cabin, Legrain wanted to speak of the incident but Gerbier avoided all conversation. So it was the following days. Besides, Armel the school teacher was going from bad to worse and Legrain no longer had any thoughts but for his friend.

## IX

The young school teacher died one night. His delirium had been no worse than usual. Some Kabyles carried his body away early in the morning. Legrain went to his work. The day flowed by and he behaved no differently than the day before. When he came back to the cabin the colonel, the pharmacist and the travelling salesman stopped their domino game and wanted to console him.

"I'm not sad," said Legrain. "Armel is better off as he is."

Gerbier said nothing to Legrain. He handed him the package of cigarettes he had bought from a guard in the afternoon. Legrain smoked three in succession, in spite of the cough that was exhausting him. Night came. Roll was called. The doors were closed. The colonel, the travelling salesman, the pharmacist went to sleep one after the other. Legrain appeared calm. Gerbier in turn fell asleep.

He was awakened by a familiar sound. Legrain was coughing. Yet Gerbier could not go back to sleep. He listened more attentively. And he understood. Legrain was forcing himself to cough to choke his sobs. Gerbier fumbled for Legrain's hand and said to him in a very low voice,

"I'm here, old man."

For several seconds there was no other sound from the place where Legrain's straw bed was. "He's fighting for his dignity," thought Gerbier. He had guessed rightly. But Legrain was only a child, just the same. Gerbier suddenly felt a body without weight and a pair of small bony shoulders contract against him. He heard a thin, barely audible wail.

"Now I'm all alone in the world. . . . Armel has left me. He's perhaps with his God. He believed in Him so much. But I can't see him there. . . . I don't believe in Him, Monsieur Gerbier. . . . I beg your pardon . . . but I can't go on any more. I haven't got anybody in the world. Talk to me once in a while, Monsieur Gerbier, will you?"

Then Gerbier said in Legrain's ear,

"We never let a comrade down in the resistance movement."

Legrain had become silent.

"The resistance. Do you hear?" Gerbier said again in a voice that was secret and heavy as the night. "Go to sleep with that word in your mind. In these days it's the finest word in the whole French language. You've had no chance to learn it. It came into existence while you were being destroyed here. Go to sleep. I'll promise to teach it to you."

## X

Gerbier was accompanying Legrain to his work. They walked slowly, and Gerbier was speaking.

"You understand, they came in their tanks, with their blank eyes. They thought that the treads of tanks are made to trace the new law of peoples. As they had manufactured many tanks, they had the assurance of having been born to write this law. They have a horror of liberty, of thought. Their true war aim is the death of thinking man, of free man. They want to exterminate everyone who has not blank eyes. They have found in France

people who had the same tastes and those have gone into their service. And those have put you to rot here, you who had not even begun to live. They have caused the death of young Armel. You saw them hand over the poor fellow who believed in the right of asylum. At the same time they published the claim that the conqueror was magnanimous. A foul old man tried to suborn the country. 'Be good, be cowardly,' he preached. 'Forget that you have been proud, joyous and free. Obey and smile at the victor. He will let you rub along unmolested.' The people who surrounded the old man calculated that France was credulous and that she was gentle, that she was the country of moderation and of the happy medium. 'France is so civilised, so weakened,' they thought, 'that she no longer knows the meaning of underground warfare and of secret death. She will accept, she will go to sleep. And in her sleep we shall put her eyes out.' And they thought, furthermore, 'We are not afraid of extremists. They have no connections. They have no weapons. And we have all the German divisions to defend us.' While they were rejoicing in this way, the resistance was being born."

Roger Legrain walked on without daring to turn his head toward Gerbier. It was as though he were afraid of intervening in the accomplishment of a miracle. This man, so distant, so sparing in words, suddenly burst into words of fire. . . . And the universe which suddenly became an altogether different universe . . . Legrain saw the grass and the shacks of the camp and the red fatigue suits and the starved figures of the Kabyles dragging themselves about at their forced labour. But all this was changing its form and its function. The life of the camp no longer stopped at the barbed-wire fences. It extended over the whole country. It was becoming illuminated, assuming a meaning. The Kabyles and Armel and himself were entering into a great human order. Legrain felt himself becoming liberated little by little from the sense of revolt that had filled him until now—from that blind, desperate, chained, confused, obtuse feeling. that was without issue and that struggled within him, tearing and ravaging all his substance. He felt himself approaching a great mystery. And he was too ignorant and too puny to contemplate the companion who was lifting the veils of this mystery for him.

"How it came about I don't know," said Gerbier. "I think no

one will ever know. But one day a peasant cut a rural telephone wire. An old woman put her cane athwart the legs of a German soldier. Tracts circulated. A butcher threw into the cold storage room a captain who was requisitioning meat with too much arrogance. A bourgeois gives a wrong address to the victors who are trying to find their way. Railway workers, priests, poachers, bankers help escaped prisoners to get through by the hundreds. Farmers shelter British soldiers. A prostitute refuses to go to bed with the conquerors. French officers, soldiers, masons, painters conceal weapons. You know nothing of all this. You were here. But for one who felt this awakening, this first stirring, it was the most inspiring thing in the world. It was the sap of liberty that was beginning to rise in the French earth. Then the Germans and their servants and the old man decided to eradicate the rank growth. But the more of it they tore up the better it grew. They have filled the prisons, they have multiplied the camps. They have become frantic. They have locked up the colonel, the travelling salesman, the pharmacist. And they have acquired even more enemies. They have resorted to the firing squad. Now blood was what the plant most needed to grow and to spread. Blood has flowed. Blood is flowing. Rivers of it will flow. And the plant will become a forest."

Gerbier and Legrain made the round of the power station. Gerbier continued,

"He who joins the resistance aims at the Germans. But at the same time he strikes Vichy and its Old Man, and the Old Man's henchmen and the directors of our camp, and the guards you see at work every day. The resistance is composed of all Frenchmen who don't want the eyes of France to turn dead and blank."

Legrain and Gerbier were sitting in the grass. The wind from the slopes was turning cool. Evening was approaching; Gerbier spoke to the young man about the newspapers of the resistance movement.

"And the people who make them dare to write what they think?" asked Legrain, his cheeks blazing.

"They can dare anything, they have no other law, no other master than their idea," said Gerbier. "This idea is stronger in them than life. The men who publish these sheets are unknown, but some day monuments will be erected to their work. The



fellow who finds the paper risks death. Those who compose the pages risk death. Those who write the articles risk death. And those who transport the newspapers risk death. Nothing can stop them. Nothing can choke the cry that rises from the mimeograph machines hidden in dingy chambers, from the presses buried away in the depths of cellars. Don't think these sheets have anything like the appearance of those that are sold in broad daylight. They are miserable little squares of paper. Clumsy sheets that somehow get printed or typed. The characters are blurred, the headings thin. The ink often smudges. The people turn them out as they can. One week in one town and one week in another. They take what lies to hand. But the paper appears. The articles follow subterranean channels. Someone collects them, someone secretly arranges them. Furtive groups set them up. The police, the agents, the spies, the informers agitate, search, nose about. The newspaper starts out on the roads of France. It isn't big, it doesn't look impressive. It swells worn, cracking, disjointed suit-cases. But every line is like a ray of gold. A ray of free thought."

"My father was a typographer . . . so I can realise . . ." said Legrain. "There can't be many of these papers."

"There are flocks of them," said Gerbier. "Each important movement of the resistance has its own, and turns out tens of thousands of copies. And then there are those of the isolated groups. And those of the provinces. And the doctors have theirs, and the musicians, and the students, and the teachers, and the university professors, and the painters, and the writers, and the engineers."

"What about the communists?" asked Legrain in a low voice.

"Why naturally, they have *L'Humanité*. As before."

"*L'Huma* . . ." said Legrain, "*L'Huma* . . ."

His hollow eyes were full of ecstasy. He wanted to say more, but a series of coughing fits prevented him.

## XI

It was noon. The prisoners had swallowed the mess-tin of dirty water which served as a meal and lay motionless in the sun. Legrain was with Gerbier, in the shadow of the cabin.

"They know how to die in the resistance movement," Gerbier was saying. "The daughter of an industrialist was to be executed by the Gestapo because she refused to reveal anything about the organisation to which she belonged. Her father was granted permission to see her. He begged her to talk. She insulted him and *ordered* the German officer who witnessed the interview to take her father away. . . . A militant of the Christian Syndicates became friendly with the Germans, either out of weakness or interest. His wife put him out of the house. And his very young son volunteered with an action group. He did sabotage, killed some sentries. When he was caught he wrote to his mother. 'Everything has been washed away. I die as a good Frenchman and a good Christian.' I saw the letter. . . .

"A famous professor was arrested, thrown into a Gestapo cell in Fresnes. They tortured him to make him reveal names. He resisted. . . . He resisted. . . . But at last he reached his limit of endurance. He became afraid of himself. He tore up his shirt and hanged himself. . . . After a violent demonstration, in the course of which German blood flowed in Paris, a dozen men were condemned to die. They were to be shot the following day at dawn. They knew it. And one of them, who was a worker, began to tell funny stories. During the whole night he made his comrades laugh. It was the German chaplain of the prison who told the worker's family about it."

Legrain averted his eyes and asked hesitantly,

"Tell me . . . Monsieur Gerbier. . . . Weren't there any communists among those demonstrators?"

"They all were," answered Gerbier. "And it was a communist, Gabriel Peri, who before he died spoke the finest words, perhaps, that have come out of the resistance movement: 'I am glad,' he said. 'We are building to-morrows that will sing.'"

Gerbier placed his hand on Legrain's narrow wrist and said to him gently,

"I should like you to understand me once and for all. There are no longer suspicions, hatreds or barriers of any sort between communists and others. To-day we are French. We are all in the same fight. And it is the communists against whom the enemy is most rabid. We know it. And we know that they are as brave as the bravest and better organised. They help us and we help

them. They like us and we like them. Everything has become very simple."

"Talk, Monsieur Gerbier, talk some more," Legrain murmured.

## XII

It was especially at night that Gerbier had time to talk.

Their little cabin, closed tight, gave back the heat accumulated during the day. The straw beds burned the men's backs. And the darkness was suffocating. The companions in captivity turned and turned again in their sleep. But nothing mattered to Legrain, not even the accelerated whistling of his lungs which sometimes, without his noticing it, forced him to press his chest between his two hands. And Gerbier told about how radio stations hidden in towns or in hamlets made it possible to speak every day with friends in the free world. He told about the work of the secret operatives, their tricks, their patience, their risks and the marvellous music which the ciphered messages make. He showed the immense network of listening posts and observers that enveloped the enemy, counted its regiments, broke through its defences, found access to its documents. And Gerbier also said that in every season, at every hour, liaison agents were travelling back and forth, riding, walking, crawling their way all over France. And he depicted this underground France, this France of buried arms depots, of command posts going from refuge to refuge, of unknown leaders, of men and women who ceaselessly changed their name, their appearance, their address and their face.

"These people," Gerbier would say, "could have kept quiet. Nothing forced them into action. Wisdom, good sense told them to eat and sleep in the shadow of the German bayonets and to watch their business flourish, their women smile, their children grow. Material goods and the goods of narrow tenderness were thereby assured them. They even had the benediction of the old man of Vichy to appease and lull their conscience. Really, nothing forced them to fight, nothing but their free soul.

"Do you know," he said, "what the life of the outlaw, of the man of the underground is like? He no longer has any identity, or else he has so many that he has forgotten his own. He has no ration card. He can no longer even half allay his hunger. He sleeps

in a loft, or in the house of a prostitute, or on the floor-tiles of a shop or in a deserted barn, or on a station bench. He can no longer see his family, who are being watched by the police. If his wife—which often happens—is also in the resistance movement, his children grow at random. The threat of being caught doubles his shadow. Every day comrades vanish, are tortured and shot. He goes from one precarious shelter to another, without hearth or home, hunted, obscure, a phantom of himself.”

And Gerbier continued,

“But he is never alone. He feels around him the faith and the tenderness of a whole enslaved people. He finds accomplices, he finds friends in the fields and in the factory. In the suburbs and in the châteaux, among gendarmes, railroad workers, smugglers, merchants and priests. Among old notaries and young girls. The poorest shares his meagre ration of bread with him, one who has not even the right to go into a baker’s shop because he is fighting for all the harvests of France.”

So spoke Gerbier. And Legrain on his burning pallet, in the choking darkness, was discovering a wholly new and enchanted country peopled by combatants without number, and without weapons, a fatherland of sacred friends, more beautiful than any fatherland ever was on earth. The resistance movement was this fatherland.

### XIII

One morning on going to his work Legrain suddenly asked,

“Monsieur Gerbier, are you a leader in the resistance movement?”

Gerbier considered Legrain’s burning and ravaged young face with an almost cruel attention. He saw in it a limitless loyalty and devotion.

“I was on the general staff of a movement,” he said. “No one here knows it. I was coming from Paris. I was arrested in Toulouse—some informer, I think. But no proof. They didn’t even dare to try me. So they sent me here.”

“For how long?” asked Legrain.

Gerbier shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“For as long as they please, of course,” he said. “You know that better than anyone.”

Legrain stopped and stared at the ground. Then he said in a choked voice, but with great firmness,

"Monsieur Gerbier, you've got to get away from here." He paused, then raised his head and added, "They need you out there."

As Gerbier did not answer, Legrain continued, "I have an idea. . . . I've had it a long time. . . . I'll tell you about it to-night."

They took leave of each other. Gerbier bought some cigarettes from the guard who acted as his purveyor. He made the round of the plateau. He wore his usual smile. He was reaching the objective he had been working toward through the stories and the images with which he had patiently intoxicated Legrain.

#### XIV

"I'll tell you what my idea is," whispered Legrain when he had made sure the colonel, the travelling salesman and the pharmacist were fast asleep.

Legrain collected his thoughts and chose his words. Then he spoke.

"What stands in the way of escape? There are two things: the barbed wire and the patrols. As for the barbed wire, the ground isn't the same level everywhere, and there are places where a slender man like yourself, Monsieur Gerbier, can squeeze under, though he might rip his clothes a little."

"I know all those places," said Gerbier.

"So much for the barbed wires," said Legrain. "That leaves the patrols. How many minutes do you need to run as far as the patrol road, pass it and be absorbed in the landscape?"

"Twelve. . . . Fifteen at the most," said Gerbier.

"Well, I can manage to make the guards blind for longer than that," said Legrain.

"I think so," said Gerbier placidly. "It's not difficult for a skilful electrician to fix it in advance so the current will break down."

"You thought of it," Legrain murmured. "And you never said a word."

"I like to command or to accept. I don't know how to ask a favour," said Gerbier. "I was waiting for it to come from you."

Gerbier leaned on one shoulder as if to try to make out his companion's face in the dark. And he said,

"I have often wondered why, when you had this means at your disposal, you never took advantage of it."

Legrain had a coughing fit before he answered.

"In the beginning I discussed the matter with Armel. He wasn't for it. He was too easily resigned, perhaps. But in a sense what he said was true. With our fatigue suits and no papers, without ration cards, we wouldn't have gone very far. Then Armel got sick. I couldn't leave him. And things weren't going so well any more with me either. For you it's quite different. With your friends of the resistance . . ."

"I've already established a contact through the guard who sells me cigarettes," said Gerbier. Without transition, he added, "In a week—two at the most—we can leave."

There was a silence. And Legrain's heart pounded so hard against his emaciated ribs that Gerbier could hear its beating. With a faltering voice the young man asked,

"You said *we*, didn't you, Monsieur Gerbier?"

"Why of course," said Gerbier. "What did you suppose?"

"I thought at certain moments that you would take me with you. But I didn't dare to be sure," said Legrain.

"So you were willing," Gerbier asked, speaking slowly, emphasising every syllable, "to make the preparations for my escape and stay here yourself?"

"That's how I had worked it out for myself," said Legrain.

"And you would have done it?"

"They need you, Monsieur Gerbier, in the resistance movement."

For some minutes Gerbier had felt a violent craving for a smoke. Yet he waited before lighting a cigarette. He hated to show the least emotion in his features.

## XV

As he was beginning his game of dominoes Colonel Jarret du Plessis made this remark to his companions,

"The little communist looks all perked up. I hear him humming every morning as he goes to work."

"It's the spring," the travelling salesman assured.

"It's rather that you get used to everything," sighed the pharmacist. "He, like everybody else, poor kid."

The three men had no hostility toward Legrain. On the contrary his age, his misfortune, his physical condition touched them, for they were naturally good-hearted. They had offered to take turns in watching over Armel. But Legrain, who was jealous of his friend, had declined their services. When they received packages containing a little food from outside they always wanted to give Legrain a share. But knowing that he would have no opportunity to reciprocate these kindnesses Legrain had stubbornly refused. Little by little, because of this uncompromising behaviour, the domino-players had come to forget the young man's existence. His change of attitude brought their attention back to him. One evening when the pharmacist was passing round some chocolate tablets which he had found in a package from his family Legrain held out his hand.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Colonel Jarret du Plessis. "The little communist is getting broken in."

The colonel turned toward Gerbier and said,

"It's your influence, Monsier, and I congratulate you."

"I rather think it's the chocolate," said Gerbier.

A few hours later, when they were the only ones still awake, Gerbier said to Legrain,

"You've picked a rather bad time to draw comments on your sweet tooth."

"It's because I thought . . . I thought I'd be able to send him something in return soon," the young man murmured.

"The same thought may have occurred to them. It's never a good idea to assume other people are more stupid than you are," said Gerbier.

They fell into silence. After a few moments Legrain asked humbly,

"Are you angry with me, Monsieur Gerbier?"

"No, of course not. That's the end of it," said Gerbier.

"Then you won't mind telling me what's going to happen after the current breaks down?" begged Legrain.

"I already went into the details of that yesterday and the day before," said Gerbier.

"If you don't tell me again," said Legrain, "I just can't bring myself to believe it, and I can't sleep. . . . Then there will really be a car?"

"A gasogene,"\* said Gerbier. "And I think Guillaume will be at the wheel."

"The former sergeant of the Foreign Legion? The hard-boiled guy? The one they also call the Bison?" Legrain whispered.

"There will be civilian clothes in the car," Gerbier went on. "We'll be driven to a presbytery. After that we'll see."

"And friends in the resistance movement will give us false papers?" asked Legrain.

"And ration cards for food."

"And you'll let me meet some communists, Monsieur Gerbier? And I'll work with them in the underground?"

"I promise you."

"But we'll keep on seeing each other, you and I, Monsieur Gerbier?"

"If you're a liaison agent."

"That's what I want to be," said Legrain.

And during the nights that followed, Legrain would ask each time,

"Tell me about Guillaume, the Bison, Monsieur Gerbier, and about anything you like."

## XVI

A day came when Gerbier, on opening a package of cigarettes that he had just bought, found inside it a folded sheet of onion-skin paper. He went to the latrines, read the message attentively and burned it. Then he made the round of the barbed-wire fences, as he habitually did. Late in the afternoon he said to Legrain,

"Everything is arranged. We're leaving on Saturday."

"In four days," Legrain stammered.

The blood completely left his pinched cheeks, then came back with a rush, and once more drained them. He leaned against Gerbier,

"Excuse me . . ." he said. "My head is turning. I'm so glad."

Legrain let himself drop gently to the ground. Gerbier realised

\*A car in use since the war equipped with a wood-burning device that produces a gasoline substitute.



that the last week had taxed the young man terribly. His face had shrunk and his eyes had grown larger. His nose was thin as a fish bone. His Adam's apple was much more prominent.

"You must calm yourself and control your feelings," said Gerbier severely, "and before Saturday you've got to get some strength back. Don't forget, we've got five kilometres to walk. You're going to take my soup at noon, do you hear?"

"I'll do it, Monsieur Gerbier."

"And you don't sleep enough. To-morrow you're going to go and ask for some sleeping pills at the infirmary."

"I will, Monsieur Gerbier."

Legrain left the cabin earlier than usual and Gerbier accompanied him as far as the doorstep.

"Only three more nights here, and it's the Bison's car," said Legrain.

He started off at a run. Gerbier watched him and thought to himself, "He's young, he'll hold out."

At the noon-day meal Gerbier gave Legrain his mess-tin. But the young man shook his head.

"I know we agreed on that, but I can't. It turns my stomach," he said.

"Then take my bread," said Gerbier, "you can eat it while you work."

Legrain stuffed the blackish slice into his fatigue jacket. His movement was limp, lifeless, his face was vacant.

"You look down in the mouth," Gerbier observed.

Legrain did not answer and walked off in the direction of the power station. That evening he did not ask Gerbier to talk to him about the Bison and the other wonders.

"Did you take your sleeping pill?" asked Gerbier.

"I took it. I'll fall asleep in no time, I guess," said Legrain.

On Thursday his behaviour was even stranger. He did not eat any lunch, and in the cabin, while waiting for nightfall, he watched the game of dominoes instead of talking with Gerbier. He seemed to fall asleep all at once.

On Friday Legrain had an absurd argument with the pharmacist and accused him of being a dirty bourgeois. Gerbier said nothing at the moment, but in the darkness and the silence he roughly seized Legrain's arm as the latter seemed already asleep and asked,

"What's wrong?"

"Why . . . nothing, Monsieur Gerbier," said Legrain.

"I beg you to answer," said Gerbier. "Don't you trust me any more? Your nerves played out? I give you my word that for my part everything is going to be ready."

"I know, Monsieur Gerbier."

"What about your end of it?"

"I'll do a clean job, I give you my word."

"Then—what's wrong?"

"I don't know, Monsieur Gerbier, really. . . . Headache. Heart's in a knot. . . ."

Gerbier's eyes narrowed, as they did in daylight when he wanted to penetrate to the secret of a face. But they were impotent in the darkness.

"You must have taken too many pills," said Gerbier at last.

"That's surely it, Monsieur Gerbier," said Legrain.

"You'll feel better to-morrow," Gerbier said in turn, "when you see the car with the Bison."

"The Bison," Legrain repeated.

But he did not go on.

Gerbier often remembered subsequently the unconscious and frightful cruelty of this dialogue in the night.

## XVII

Saturday morning, in the course of his usual walk, Gerbier passed by the power station, where Legrain had been working alone since the removal of the old Austrian engineer. Gerbier saw with satisfaction that Legrain was calm.

"Everything is ready," said the young man.

Gerbier examined Legrain's work. The clocklike mechanism which was to create the short circuit had been conceived with consummate intelligence and skill. The current would be broken at the hour required.

"And don't worry," Legrain reassured him, "those dumb-bells on the night shift will take forty minutes to repair it."

"Nobody could have done better than you've done. We're as good as out," said Gerbier.

"Thanks, Monsieur Gerbier," the young man murmured. His eyes were very bright.

## XVIII

The colonel, the pharmacist and the travelling salesman were finishing their game of dominoes by the last glimmer of daylight. The twilight was gathering its grey smoke over the plateau. But a belt of hard, fixed light imprisoned the twilight within the camp. The patrol road between the network of metallic brambles was violently illuminated. Behind this belt and by contrast it was already night. In front of their cabin, Gerbier and Legrain were looking in silence at the glistening barbed wires. From time to time Gerbier would reach to the bottom of his pocket to feel the tool Legrain had brought back to spring the locks. A guard in a beret cried,

"Roll-call!"

Legrain and Gerbier went inside. The guard counted the occupants of the hut and shut the doors. Darkness once more. Each one fumbled his way to his straw bed. For some time the colonel, the travelling salesman and the pharmacist exchanged remarks that became increasingly desultory. Gerbier and Legrain were silent. Their mates dozed off with their habitual sighs and groans. Gerbier and Legrain were silent.

Gerbier was pleased with Legrain's silence. He had feared that Legrain would be too excited for this wait. The mechanism Legrain had rigged up was to go off at midnight. They still had about an hour. Gerbier smoked several cigarettes, then went to the door and forced the lock without making any noise. He pushed the door. He saw the brutal light that encircled the plateau. Gerbier came back to the straw bed and notified Legrain.

"Be ready, Roger, it won't be long now."

Then once more Gerbier heard the movements of Legrain's heart.

"Monsieur Gerbier," the young man murmured with difficulty, "I've got to tell you something."

He got his breath again with an effort.

"I'm not going," he said.

In spite of all his self-control Gerbier was on the point of

raising his voice in an imprudent way. But he got the better of himself and spoke in the usual pitch of these conversations in the dark.

"You're afraid?" he asked very softly.

"Oh, Monsieur Gerbier," Legrain moaned.

And Gerbier felt sure that Legrain was inaccessible to fear. As sure as if he could have seen his face.

"You think you're too tired to make it?" said Gerbier. "I'll carry you if necessary."

"I would have made it. I would have made it, even much farther," said Legrain.

And Gerbier felt that he was telling the truth.

"I'll explain to you, Monsieur Gerbier, only don't talk to me," said Legrain. "I've got to make it fast, and it isn't easy to do."

Legrain's lungs wheezed. He coughed, and went on,

"When I went to get the pills to sleep as you told me, I saw the doctor. He's a nice fellow, the doctor. He's an old man who understands. He had us put here, Armel and me, because at least it doesn't rain through the roof and the floor stays dry. He couldn't do anything more. What I mean is you can talk to him. He didn't think I looked well. He examined me. I didn't understand everything he told me. But enough anyway to gather that one of my lungs is gone and the other is in bad shape. He seemed pretty upset about seeing me shut up here with no hope of getting out. Then I asked him what would happen if I was free. He told me that with two years in a sanatorium I could be well again. Otherwise I wouldn't be good for anything. I came away from his office stunned. You saw me. . . . I was thinking all the time about what you had told me of the life in the underground. It took me until this morning to realise that I couldn't go."

Gerbier considered himself pretty hardened. And he was. He believed he never acted without due reflection. And this was true. He had inflamed Legrain with his stories only in order to have an accomplice he could trust. Yet it was without reflection, without calculation and seized by an unfamiliar contraction that he said,

"I'm not going to leave you. I have ways of getting money, and I'll find others. You'll be safe and cared for. You'll have all the time you need to get back into shape."

"That's not why I was leaving, Monsieur Gerbier," said the calm voice of the invisible young man. "I wanted to be a liaison agent. I don't want to take ration cards from the comrades for my poor little health. I don't want to hinder the resistance. You've shown me too well what it's like."

Gerbier felt himself physically unable to answer. And Legrain continued,

"But just the same I'm very glad to know about the resistance movement. I won't be so unhappy any more. I understand life and I love it. I'm like Armel now. I have faith."

He became a little animated, and said in a fiercer tone,

"But it's not in the next world that I look for justice, Monsieur Gerbier. Tell our friends here and on the other side of the water, tell them to hurry. I should like to have time to see the end of the men with blank eyes."

He stopped talking, and the silence that followed was one whose duration neither of them measured. Without knowing it they both had their eyes fixed on the slit in the doorway through which they could see the glare of the lights on the patrol road.

They got up at the same time because that luminous thread suddenly snapped. The darkness of freedom had joined the imprisoned darkness. Gerbier and Legrain were at the door.

Against all prudence, against all good sense, Gerbier spoke again,

"They'll discover the sabotage, they'll see that I've escaped. They'll make the connection. They'll think of you."

"What more can they do to us?" murmured Legrain.

Gerbier still did not leave.

"On the contrary, I'll be useful to you," said the young man. "They'll come and get me to make the repair. I'll go out so fast that they won't see your empty straw bed and I'll keep them running around another half hour. You'll be far away with the Bison."

Gerbier crossed the doorstep.

"Think it over for the last time," he almost pleaded.

"I was never the kind to be a burden to anyone," answered Legrain. "I'm not going to begin with the resistance movement."

Gerbier slipped between the door and the jamb without turning round and headed straight for the opening in the barbed wires.

He had studied it a hundred times and he had counted a hundred times the number of steps he would have to take to reach the spot.

Legrain carefully closed the door, went back to his straw bed, dug his teeth into the ticking that covered it and lay very still.

## *The Execution*

A note from the organisation to which he belonged had instructed Paul Dounat (whose name was now Vincent Henry) to be in Marseilles toward the middle of the afternoon and wait in front of the Reformed Church for a comrade whom he knew well. Dounat had been at the appointed spot for a few minutes when a gasogene car drove past him and stopped some thirty metres beyond. A man of short stature stepped out. He wore a derby, a dark maroon overcoat, and his shoulders lunged heavily as he walked. This man whom Dounat had never met went straight up to him and said as he showed a *Sûreté* card,

"Police—your papers."

Dounat did not move a muscle. His false identification papers were perfect. The man with the derby said with more amenity,

"I see that everything is in order, Monsieur. I shall beg you nevertheless to accompany me to our offices. A simple verification."

Dounat bowed. He had no fear of the verification either.

The driver was standing beside the running-board of the car. He was thickset and had a boxer's crushed nose. He opened the door and pushed Dounat inside with a single movement. The man with the derby got in right behind him. The car started off very fast up the slope. Then Dounat saw, ensconced in the corner of the seat, with his head held back so as not to be seen from the outside, André Roussel, who also bore the name of Philippe Gerbier and who had let his moustache grow. Paul Dounat felt

all his blood suddenly rush to his heart and he collapsed on the folding seat like a man disoriented.

The make-believe police official mopped his tonsure-shaped bald spot, considered his hat with disgust and growled,

"Dirty kind of job!"

"Felix, no matter how much you hate derbies you'll have to put it back on again just the same," said Gerbier absently.

"I know it," Felix growled, "but only when we stop."

Paul Dounat thought to himself, "That's when they'll kill me."

He formulated this thought with indifference. He was no longer afraid. The first shock had drained him of all living emotion. As always, the moment he no longer had any choice he resigned himself to the worst with a strange docility and ease. Only he would have liked to drink something strong. His veins seemed to him quite hollow.

"Look at him," said Felix to Gerbier. "He's the one who sold you out, all right, you and Zephyr and the radio man."

Gerbier agreed with a slight movement of his eyelids. He didn't feel like talking. He didn't feel like thinking. Everything was made obvious by Paul Dounat's very attitude: treason, and the inner mechanism of this treason. Dounat had been brought into the resistance by his mistress. As long as she had been able to animate him Dounat had shown himself useful, intelligent and courageous. When Françoise was arrested, he had continued to act out of inertia. Caught in turn, but quickly released, he had become the instrument of the police.

"We should have stopped using him when Françoise disappeared," said Gerbier. "That was a mistake. But we have so few people and so much to do."

Gerbier lit a cigarette. Through the smoke Dounat appeared to him even vaguer and more insubstantial than usual. Good family, good manners. . . . Pleasant features. . . . A small mole in the middle of his upper lip attracted attention to his mouth, which was well-shaped and soft. His face was smooth, without sharp ridges and ended in an indeterminate, rather full chin.

"Obviously defective will-power," thought Gerbier absently. "He needs someone to make up his mind for him. Françoise, the police, and now us . . . for underground activity, the role of informer, death."

Aloud he said,

"I think, Paul, that it's useless to give you our proofs and to ask you questions."

Dounat did not even raise his head. Gerbier continued to smoke. He experienced the kind of boredom which a tedious and necessary formality inspires. He began to think of everything he had to do afterwards. His report . . . send out two instructors . . . draw up messages in code for London . . . the meeting with the big boss who was coming from Paris . . . choose the Command Post for the following day.

"Couldn't we hurry?" Gerbier asked Felix.

"I don't think so," said Felix. "The Bison knows his job as nobody does. He is driving as fast as anyone can without attracting attention."

Dounat, with his chin resting in one hand, was looking toward the sea.

"I'm in a hurry, too" Felix continued. "There's that old post I have to look over again. I have to change the handlebar on that young liaison agent's bicycle. And then there are the parachutists coming to-night who have to be met."

"What about the chief's new false papers?" asked Gerbier.

"I have them on me," said Felix. "Do you want them now?" Gerbier nodded.

Paul Dounat understood perfectly that if the two men spoke so freely in his presence it was because they felt assured of his silence, of his eternal silence. They were already concerned with the moment—and this moment was near at hand—when he would be effaced from the human order. But this condemnation left Dounat without anxiety or inner turmoil. For him, likewise, his death was an accepted fact. It belonged in a sense to the past. The present alone had a value and a meaning. And now that the car had passed the point of the Old Port, the present was composed entirely, and with a prodigious intensity, of that expanse of blue water, of those islets, indented like antique galleys, those pure and arid hills, the colour of light sand which seemed to hold up the sky on the other side of the gulf.

Suddenly, because the car was passing before a hotel on La Corniche which Dounat recognised, Françoise's face assembled, absorbed all the scattered features of this magnificence. Françoise



was standing on the edge of the terrace that jutted over the sea.

She was wearing a summer dress that left her neck and her arms bare. She held the light and the warmth of day in the generous substance of her face. With a light and familiar movement Dounat was caressing the nape of Françoise's neck. She was leaning her head back a little and Dounat could see her throat, her shoulders, her bosom swelling, expanding, like a plant that ripens all at once. And Françoise kissed him on the mole in the middle of his upper lip.

Unconsciously Dounat touched this little brown spot. Unconsciously, too, Gerbier touched the moustache, still bristly, that he had worn since his escape from the Camp of L. . . . Felix was eyeing his derby with disgust.

A turn of the road snatched the hotel from Paul Dounat's sight. The image of Françoise with her head thrown back disappeared. This caused Dounat no astonishment. These games belonged to another age of the world. The underground life, then, had not begun.

Felix knocked with the brim of his derby against the glass that separated him from the driver. Then he crammed the hat on his bald-crowned head. The car stopped. Paul Dounat ceased to gaze at the sea and turned toward the other side of the boulevard. There stood a hill with a cluster of peaceful, humble and wretched little houses and villas clinging to its steep slope. The car had stopped before a lane without asphalt or pavement, that climbed straight up between those low houses and melancholy little gardens like a mountain path.

The driver lowered the glass pane behind him and said to Gerbier,

"The car'll have a hard time of it on that gradient."

"And it'll make a lot of noise. . . . Everybody will come to the windows," said Felix.

Gerbier looked narrowly at Paul Dounat's profile. The latter, expressionless, was again turned to the sea.

"We'll walk it," said Gerbier.

"I'll go with you, then," said the driver.

He had the hoarse voice of men who have smoked too much, drunk too much, and who have had to shout orders for a long time. His massive, tanned face, with deep-sunk grey eyes, almost

filled the window-frame.

Gerbier looked at Dounat once more and said,

"It's not necessary, Guillaume."

"Really not," said Felix.

The driver in turn looked at Paul Dounat and grunted,

"I agree with you."

Gerbier waited for a creaking street-car with passengers overflowing on the steps to pass. Then he opened the door, Felix got out and Dounat, on a gesture from Gerbier, did likewise. Felix took one of Dounat's arms and Gerbier the other.

"I'll go and fetch the cases and I'll be back for the body after dark," said the driver, putting in his clutch.

Dounat climbed the abrupt slope, crowded between Felix and Gerbier as between two friends, and he thought about the way in which the communists sometimes got rid of their traitors. They would get the man at night to the seashore, dispatch him, undress him, roll him up in wire netting and throw him into the sea. The crabs, through the meshes, would entirely devour the body. Françoise had been with Dounat the night he had heard this story. A pitiless burst of passion had inflamed her face, ordinarily so sweet and gay. "I'd like to take part in such an operation," she had said. "There is no death vile enough for people who sell out their comrades." Paul Dounat remembered that outburst, and also his mistress's neck, which had flushed a deep pink, and he was docile as he climbed the steep lane between Gerbier and Felix.

Now and again they saw on the doorsteps a woman in a black skirt, with dishevelled hair, lazily shaking a carpet. Children played in the sordid little gardens. A man leaning against a fence was scratching his bare ankles above his felt slippers as he looked at the three passers-by. At each of these encounters, Felix would press the revolver which he held firmly grasped in his pocket and whisper in Paul Dounat's ear,

"A single word and I'll let you have it right away."

But in the arm that he was holding Gerbier felt only limpness and obedience. Again he experienced a sense of deep boredom.

They finally turned into a narrow blind alley flanked by windowless walls and blocked at the end by two identical cottages built flush against each other. The shutters were raised in the one to the left.

"*Nom de Dieu !*" said Felix, stopping savagely. His frank, round face expressed utter bewilderment.

"Ours," he said to Gerbier, "is the cottage on the right with the closed shutters."

Felix swore again.

"The other day when we rented it the shack next door was empty," he added.

"It's too bad, of course, but all the more reason for not attracting attention," said Gerbier. "Come on."

The three men quickly reached the end of the blind alley. Then the door of the right-hand cottage seemed to open of its own accord, and they went inside. The boy who stood behind the door immediately pushed it shut again, slid back the panel of the spy-hole and turned the key. All his movements were executed without noise. But in their haste and their cadence there was an ill-concealed nervous tension. And Gerbier had further evidence of this when he heard a jerky whisper,

"The room at the back. . . . Do go in the room at the back. . . ."

Felix pushed Dounat by the back of the neck and followed him.

"It's him . . . the traitor . . . who's got to be . . . ?" the boy who had admitted the group asked in a barely audible voice.

"He's the one," said Gerbier.

"And you're the leader?"

"I'm in charge of this job," said Gerbier.

They in turn entered the back room. The shades were drawn, and after the glare of daylight the darkness seemed at first intense. But enough light came in through the ill-fitting slats to enable them to see clearly after a few moments. Gerbier could make out the plaster peelings that quivered on the ceiling, the moisture stains on the walls, the two unmatched chairs, the mattress placed directly on the floor and covered with a quilt. And he could examine the comrade chosen by Felix to assist in Dounat's execution. He was a tall, straight young man, lean, modestly dressed, with a sharp-featured and sensitive face. He had rather prominent, fiery eyes.

Felix pointed his derby in the direction of the young man and said to Gerbier,

"That's Claude Lemasque."

Gerbier gave a half-smile. He knew that an assumed name often revealed an element of character when the person chose it himself. This one had come into the resistance movement bringing with him the religion of secret societies.

"He's been crying for a long time for a tough assignment," Felix added.

Lemasque turned to Gerbier.

"I came more than an hour ago," he said, speaking very rapidly, "to put everything in order. That's when I saw the awful business next door. They got here this morning, or during the night at the earliest. I passed by here in the evening and there wasn't anybody. When I saw the open shutters I ran out to call Felix on the phone, but he was already on his way. There was nothing to be done, was there?"

"Absolutely nothing, I assure you, absolutely nothing," said Gerbier, with all the deliberation and all the evenness of tone that he could put into a few words.

This lad spoke too much, spoke too low, spoke too fast.

"It's a good spot," Gerbier went on, "we'll manage."

"We can go on to the questioning, if you wish," said Lemasque. "Everything is ready up there in the attic. It's a little like a court. I've put armchairs, a table, some paper."

Gerbier half smiled and said,

"We're not here to hold a trial."

"We're here for this," said Felix impatiently.

He had pulled from his pocket the butt of his revolver that he had been continually fingering. The metal shone in the half-light. Lemasque glanced for the first time toward Dounat. The latter was leaning against a wall and was looking at no one.

The men who surrounded him continued to lack volume and reality. But things were armed with a power he had never known them to have. The crumbling ceiling, the mouldy walls and the furniture seemed to wait, observe and understand. The objects had the relief, the substance and the density that Dounat no longer had. Yet his eyes eventually had fastened on the drab, reddish-brown quilt. Dounat recognised it. In the dubious hotels, in the poor transient houses where, between missions, he had been lucky enough to meet Françoise, Dounat had always seen this quilt. This also belonged to another age of the world. Refine-

ments no longer had a place in it. Hazards, the dangers of secret activity, gave their form and their colour to love. Françoise would sit down on the red quilt, touch up her hair, and in a choked, happy voice would relate the events of her days and nights. She loved this work, she loved the leaders, she loved the comrades, she loved France. And Dounat felt that she carried over this passion physically to him. Then he too loved the resistance. He was no longer harassed, he no longer felt any anxiety about living without a home and without a name. He was no longer lawless, hunted, lost. Under the red quilt he would press against Françoise's shoulders and breasts. That warm, exalted, brave body became a kind of wonderful lair, a place of asylum. An extraordinary starry security enveloped pleasure.

"Well?" asked Felix, pulling out his revolver completely.

"It's impossible . . . it's impossible . . ." said Lemasque. "I was here before you were. You can hear everything. . . . Listen . . ."

In the adjoining cottage a little girl began to sing a thin, monotonous melody. The song seemed to rise from the very room.

"They're not walls, but cigarette-paper," said Lemasque with fury.

Felix put his revolver back in his pocket and swore.

"Aren't those damned Englishmen ever going to send us the noiseless guns we keep asking them for?"

"Come with me," said Gerbier. "We'll see if there isn't a better spot."

Gerbier and Felix left the room. Lemasque hurriedly placed himself in front of the door as though Dounat had wanted to escape. But Dounat made no movement.

Nothing was happening as Lemasque had anticipated. He had prepared himself, with deep exaltation, for an act that would be dreadful but full of solemnity. Three men would sit: a leader of the organisation, Felix, himself. Before them the traitor would defend his life with lies, with desperate cries. They would get him tangled in contradictions. And Lemasque would kill him, proud to pierce a criminal heart. Instead of this grim justice—a little girl's song, the steps of his accomplices that resounded in the floor above, and in front of him this man with light auburn hair, young, with a sad, docile face, with his mole in the centre of his lip, who kept looking obstinately at a red quilt.

As a matter of fact, Dounat no longer saw the quilt. What he now saw was Françoise, naked, in the midst of the police who were tormenting her. Dounat was leaning more and more heavily against the wall. He felt himself on the point of fainting. But there was not only terror in the depth of his weakness.

The little girl continued to sing. Her quavering, fragile voice communicated an unbearable anxiety to Lemasque's nerves.

"How could you do it?" he suddenly asked Paul Dounat.

Mechanically the latter looked up. Lemasque could not guess the nature of the images that gave Dounat's eyes their humble, shameful and troubled expression. But he saw in them such deep human misery that he felt like screaming.

Gerbier and Felix reappeared.

"No use," said the latter. "The cellar connects with the cellar next door, and the attic carries the sound even more than here."

"But we've got to do something, we've got to," murmured Lemasque, whose thin hands were beginning to flutter with impatience.

"We ought to have a heavy knife. The Bison always has one on him."

"A knife?" murmured Lemasque. "A knife. . . . You're not seriously considering it?"

Felix's frank, round face became very red.

"Do you think we're doing this for fun, imbecile?" Felix said in an almost threatening tone.

"If you try it I'm going to stop you," Lemasque whispered.

"And I'll smash your teeth for you," said Felix.

Gerbier smiled his half-smile.

"Look in the dining-room and in the kitchen to see if you find something we can use," he said to Felix.

Lemasque feverishly approached Gerbier and said in his ear,

"It's impossible—just consider it, I beg you. It's murder."

"In any case, we're here to kill," said Gerbier. "Do you agree?"

"I . . . I agree . . ." Lemasque stammered. "But not that way. . . We must . . ."

"The way it's done, I know, I know," said Gerbier.

Lemasque was not used to that half-smile.

"I'm not afraid, I swear to you," he said.

"I know, I know. . . . It's something quite different," said Gerbier.

"It's the first time I've done this kind of thing, you understand," Lemasque went on.

"It's the first time for us, too," said Gerbier. "I guess it shows."

He looked at Paul Dounat, who had pulled himself together a little. His weakness had vanished, and so had the image of Françoise. The last age of the world had come.

The door opened.

"God-damned house," said Felix, his hands empty.

He looked very tired, and his eyes travelled all around the room, but avoiding the spot where Dounat stood.

"It occurred to me," Felix went on huskily, "it occurred to me that perhaps we'd do better to leave him here till to-night, till the Bison comes."

"No," said Gerbier. "We're all very busy, and besides I want to report to the chief that the matter has been closed."

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*, we can't smash in his skull with the revolver-butt, after all," said Felix.

Paul Dounat at this moment made his first spontaneous movement. He beat his arms feebly and placed his open palms before his face. Gerbier realised to what extent Dounat feared physical suffering.

"Much more than death," thought Gerbier. "That's the way the police were able to force him to betray."

Gerbier said to Felix,

"Put a gag on him."

When Felix had stuffed his thick checked handkerchief into Dounat's mouth and Dounat had fallen on the mattress, Gerbier said distinctly,

"Strangle him."

"With . . . our hands? . . ." Felix asked.

"No," said Gerbier, "there is a dish-towel in the kitchen, which will do very well."

Lemasque began to pace the room. He did not notice that he was pulling so hard on his fingers that the joints cracked. Suddenly he stopped his ears. The little girl in the next-door house was beginning to sing again. His facial expression was such that Gerbier was afraid he was going to give way to a nervous fit. He

went up to Lemasque and brutally knocked his hands down.

"No fuss, now," said Gerbier. "Dounat's got to die. That's what you came for and you're going to help us. One of our radio men was shot because of him. A comrade is croaking in Germany— isn't that enough for you?"

The young man wanted to speak. Gerbier didn't give him a chance.

"You're an employee at the town hall, I know, and also a reserve officer. And it isn't your job to choke a defenceless man. But Felix is a garage mechanic, and I'm an engineer. Only the truth of it is that you and Felix and I are no longer anything but members of the resistance movement. And that changes everything. Would you have thought before this that you were going to get a kick out of manufacturing false seals, false stamps, false documents, that you would be proud of being a forger? You asked for something harder to do. You've got it. Don't complain."

Felix had returned noiselessly and he was listening.

"We have a specialist for executions," Gerbier went on. "But he isn't free to-day. And so much the better. Everyone needs to have his share of the hardest work. We've got to learn. It's not vengeance. It's not even justice. It's a necessity. We have no prison to protect us from dangerous people."

"That's right," said Felix. "I'm glad I heard you."

His frank, round face had reassumed a kind of implacable serenity. He carefully stretched out the long, stiff dish-cloth he had brought back. Lemasque still trembled. But his trembling was weakening, as at the end of an attack of fever.

"Carry Dounat to that chair," said Gerbier. "Felix will get in front of him. I'll hold his arms, and Lemasque will hold his knees." Dounat did not resist.

And vaguely astonished to see that everything was transpiring with such ease—with so few inner obstacles, especially—Gerbier took his place behind the back of the chair, above which Paul Dounat's head protruded. But at the moment of seizing Dounat by the shoulders Gerbier hesitated. He had just noticed, on Dounat's neck, a little below the ear, a mole similar to the one on his upper lip. Because of this little spot the flesh that surrounded it seemed more living, more tender, more vulnerable, like a bit of childhood. And Gerbier felt that this flesh was not capable of



enduring one ounce of suffering. By this flesh Dounat's treason became innocent. The Bison could face torture. And Felix. And Gerbier himself. But not Dounat, nor, for that matter, the young man who, clinging to the knees of the condemned, was breathing like a man in his last agony.

Opposite Gerbier Felix was waiting for the leader to give him a signal. But Gerbier's arms were so heavy that he could not lift them to Dounat's shoulders.

"Without a doubt Felix, at this moment, has a more frightful look on his face than this wretch," thought Gerbier.

Then he thought of Felix's goodheartedness, of his faithfulness and his courage, of his wife, his ailing and undernourished little boy, of everything that Felix had done for the resistance movement. Not to kill Dounat was to kill Felix. Dounat alive would betray Felix. That also was inscribed in the little brown spot and the too tender flesh of the neck. Gerbier suddenly had the strength to raise his arms. It was not Paul Dounat's fault if he was going to die and it was not the fault of those who were killing him. The only, the eternally guilty one, was the enemy that imposed the fatality of horror upon the French.

Gerbier's hands fell on Dounat's shoulders, but at the same time Gerbier said in his ear,

"I swear to you, old man, you won't feel any pain."

The rolled dish-cloth swung down over the feeble neck. Felix pulled savagely at both ends. Gerbier felt the life ebbing very fast from the arms he was holding. It seemed to him that their convulsions passed into his own body. Each of them accumulated in Gerbier a new force of hatred against the German and against his tools.

Gerbier had Dounat's body carried to the mattress and covered it with the red quilt.

He went over to the window. Through the slits in the blinds an empty plot could be seen. The spot was well chosen.

Felix was putting on his derby. Those short, sturdy legs were rather unsteady.

"Do we go?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Just a moment," said Gerbier.

Lemasque went over to Gerbier. His sharp, nervous face was covered with sweat.

"I didn't think," he said, "that one could do so much for the resistance movement."

He began to weep silently.

"Neither did I," said Gerbier.

He cast a quick glance at the red quilt and said to Lemasque in a kindly tone,

"You must always carry cyanide pills on you. And if you're caught you must use them, old man."

## *The Embarkation for Gibraltar*

Jean-François was walking very fast along the Promenade des Anglais, although he was too early to go to the fashionable bar to join a few friends who met there every day, refugees from Paris like himself and, also like himself, having nothing to do. Jean-François was walking fast because of the sun, of the sea that broke on the pebble beach, and because of his youth. Before reaching the Place Masséna, Jean-François stopped before an exclusive shirt-maker's. In the window were some dressing gowns of very fine silk that one could buy without ration stamps. Jean-François did not in the least need a dressing gown. Yet he entered the shop. After all, he must do something. The salesman smiled at him because everyone smiled at Jean-François, who was handsome, strong, simple and who had blue eyes that held no mental reservations. And because the salesman smiled at him Jean-François bought two dressing gowns. He went out, thought himself very foolish, and laughed. At this moment he caught sight of a man in a leather jacket, short, but thickset and powerfully built and who charged, rather than walked, his shoulders lunging terribly.

"Felix," Jean-François shouted lustily. "Felix la Tonsure !"

The man turned round with a hard, springy movement, recog-

nised Jean-François and only then smiled. They had served in the same reconnaissance corps during the war.

"You haven't changed, old boy," said Felix, "still young and handsome."

"How about you, let's see . . ." said Jean-François.

He wanted to pull off Felix la Tonsure's hat to laugh at the bald spot that had won him his nickname. The other stopped him.

"I'm afraid of draughts," he said curtly.

"How is it you're in Nice? What about your garage in Levallois?" asked Jean-François.

"The Fritzes wanted me to work on their repair jobs. So you can imagine I left them some wrecks," said Felix.

His full, alert face had assumed that noncommittal expression of his which Jean-François had seen when he was in ambush or on patrol. He was a brave man, straightforward, aboveboard, as Jean-François liked men to be.

"Let's have a drink," he said.

But Felix refused. They would drink later. First he wanted to speak to Jean-François.

They went down a quieter street.

"What are you doing in civilian life at the moment?" asked Felix.

"Why, nothing at all," said Jean-François.

"And against the Boches?"

"Why . . . nothing either," said Jean-François, more slowly.

"Why not?"

"I don't know . . ." said Jean-François. "How are you going to go about it? Not much you can do, alone. . . . And there's nobody around. . . ."

"Well, I've got some work for you, you bum," said Felix. "Something just made for you. Secret papers to carry on the Q.T. and weapons to hide and teaching bright little boys to outwit the cops and the Gestapo. A real reconnaissance corps job. A great life."

"A great life," Jean-François repeated.

The one he was leading had suddenly become unbearable to him.

"You'll have to get up early," said Felix, "and spend nights on the road without knowing what it's all about, without trying to find out."

"I like movement, and I'm not curious, as you know," said Jean-François.

Felix la Tonsure rested his eyes for a moment on his companion's athletic shoulders, on his handsome face, so bright and resolute.

"Shock troopers like you are what we need," said Felix. "I haven't wasted my day."

They took a few steps in silence, pleased with each other. Then Felix said,

"You come and see me to-morrow morning in Marseilles. I've taken over a little bicycle shop there. That way I can take care of my kids and it gives me a blind. I'll tell you the address.

Jean-François reached into his pocket for a notebook.

"None of that, my boy, none of that," Felix exclaimed, "never put anything in writing. Learn everything by heart, keep it in your head."

Felix looked hard at Jean-François and continued,

"And forget you've got a tongue. Just keep your mouth shut. Understand?"

"I'm not crazy," said Jean-François.

"That's what everybody says," Felix observed. "And then you've got a wife. . . ."

Jean-François shrugged his shoulders.

"Or relatives you never hide anything from," Felix went on.

"My father and my mother are dead and I only have an older brother who wouldn't leave Paris," said Jean-François.

He suddenly began to laugh and added,

"I think he's wonderful, but there's no danger of my telling him anything. He's a baby."

Felix looked at Jean-François' face, so fresh and rosy, and laughed in turn.

"And you ought to know," he said.

He gave Jean-François his address and they went into the first café they found. It happened to be a day when liquor was sold.

## II

This life was really made to order for Jean-François. All the elements that could please him were here combined: violent

physical exercise, the risk and the joy of passing through the enemy's meshes, comradeship, obedience to a group leader whom he loved. Others took the trouble to think things out and give orders. He had only the fun. He would ride his bicycle over the beautiful red coastal roads. He would travel by train to Toulouse, Lyon or Savoy. He would cross over into the forbidden zone in spite of the German customs-men and their dogs. He would carry ciphered messages, explosives, weapons, radio transmitting sets. In barns, coves, cellars, clearings, he taught simple, serious and passionate people the use of the English submachine-guns. He introduced himself to them under an assumed name, and he did not know who they were. They loved one another, nevertheless, with an immeasurable warmth and confidence. One morning he swam several kilometres with underwater glasses to locate a mysterious parcel which a mysterious boat had put down at sea. On a moonlight night he picked up some parachutes that had dropped out of the deep sky.

Felix la Tonsure (Jean-François continued to know only him in the ranks of the organisation) spared his reconnaissance corps comrade neither fatigue nor danger.

"With your baby face," he would say, "you can get away with anything."

This was true. And Jean-François felt it. And this complicity, this friendliness of fate redoubled his strength, his boldness and his pleasure.

Secret activity was like tar. It absorbed ever more and more. The more you had done the more there remained to do. The needs were enormous. Determined men who were free with their time and their money were few and far between. Jean-François no longer slept two nights in succession under the same roof. He lived in the very heart of danger. By imperceptible degrees he had become the man who performed the most hazardous feats. He owed it to his endurance, to his skill, to his lucky boldness. He had not on this account penetrated more deeply into the secrets of the organisation to which he belonged. He was responsible—with a handful of intrepid lads—solely to Felix la Tonsure. Felix received his orders from a higher source. Beyond that was utter darkness. But the mystery did not irritate, did not tantalise and did not even interest Jean-François. He felt neither its weight nor

its poetry. He was born for movement and for play. The unknown individuals who, without knowing him, disposed of his existence gave him these unceasingly and they were of a singularly intense kind.

### III

A mission that took Jean-François to Paris showed him how completely he was formed and absorbed by the clandestine life.

When Jean-François got off the train at the Gare de Lyon, he was carrying a suitcase that contained an English radio transmitting set, dropped by parachute some days before in a central department. A man caught with such baggage faced death by torture.

Now that morning some agents of the Gestapo and the Feldgendarmerie were inspecting all luggage at the station exit.

Jean-François had no time to reflect. Near him a child with big knees and skinny calves trotted painfully behind an aged woman. Jean-François took the child in his arms and at the same time handed his suitcase to a German soldier who was walking along with his arms dangling.

"Will you carry this, old man," said Jean-François smiling. "I'll never manage alone."

The German soldier looked at Jean-François, smiled in turn, took the suitcase and passed without examination. Some moments later Jean-François was sitting in a subway compartment with his suitcase between his legs.

But it was not a good morning. At the station where Jean-François got off he found a new barrage—formed, this time, by the French police. Jean-François had to open his suitcase.

"What have you got there?" the agent asked.

"You can see for yourself, officer," said Jean-François simply: "A radio."

"All right, you can pass," said the agent.

Still laughing over these two successes, Jean-François delivered the transmitting set to a second-hand furniture dealer on the left bank. The latter asked him to lunch with him. He had, just the day before, exchanged a bedside table for a fine smoked sausage and a little butter and he was eager to share this feast with his comrade.

"Come and smell it," said the dealer.

He led Jean-François into the back room. On a cast-iron stove the sausage was gently frying. Jean-François felt his nostrils dilating. But he refused. He had a surprise to carry out.

Jean-François' suitcase was wonderfully light. And in spite of a very tiring night of travel he felt wonderfully fit. He crossed half of Paris on foot. The swarming of enemy uniforms, the hard and melancholy silence of the streets could not make a breach in his good humour. This morning it was he who had won a victory.

Swinging his suitcase and whistling the march of his former regiment, Jean-François arrived in the Avenue de la Muette in front of an absurd and charming little house, built at the end of the last century, which belonged to his elder brother. There were, in this small mansion, some beautiful paintings, innumerable books and a few precious ancient musical instruments. There had been also, before the invasion, a quiet, refined woman and a bellicose little boy who had Jean-François' eyes. The mother and the child had left for the country upon the Germans' arrival, and had not returned. But Jean-François' brother had refused to leave his house because of the paintings, the musical instruments and the books.

Jean-François forbade the old housekeeper to announce him and noiselessly opened the library door. He saw his brother there, buried in an armchair and reading a thick volume. One could hardly see his face because he was wearing a heavy overcoat with the collar turned up and a wool cap pulled far down over his eyes. This struck Jean-François as very funny. Still all warm and tingling from his fast walk, he did not feel that the house was icy.

"Greetings, Saint Luc," cried Jean-François.

His brother's name was simply Luc. But because of his even temper, his love of the spiritual life and his benevolence toward all men, a few classmates had baptised him Saint Luc. The name had clung to him in the family.

"Little Jean, little Jean," said Luc, whose head barely reached Jean-François' shoulders.

The two brothers embraced. . . . There was a considerable difference in age between them, but this did not unduly impress Jean-François. He felt himself so much stronger, more practical, more resourceful than his brother.

"All the books are here, and the harpsichord and the oboe," said Jean-François. "So, life is still beautiful."

"Still, still," said Luc tenderly.

Then he asked,

"But how did you come, little Jean? I hope you have an *Ausweiss*?""\*

"Oh, oh! Saint Luc is no longer in the clouds. Saint Luc himself knows that one must have an *Ausweiss*!" exclaimed Jean-François.

He began to laugh, and so did Luc. Jean-François laughed very loud and Luc almost silently. But in different registers it was the same quality of laughter.

"Yes, I have an *Ausweiss*, Saint Luc," said Jean-François. "And even . . . and even . . ."

Jean-François paused for a moment, because he had been on the point of saying that his safe-conduct was false and admirably imitated. He concluded,

"And I'm even dying of hunger."

"We'll have lunch right away," said Luc.

He called the old housekeeper and asked her,

"What do we have that's good to-day?"

"Why, yellow turnips, like yesterday, Monsieur Luc," said the servant.

"Ah! ah! and what else?"

"Some unrationed cheese,"† said the housekeeper.

"Ah! ah!" said Luc.

He looked at Jean-François with a guilty expression.

"There is still a little butter that Madame sent from the country last week," said the housekeeper. "But we have no bread to put it on."

"I have loads of bread tickets," exclaimed Jean-François, "and I even . . ."

He caught himself again. These tickets had been stolen for the benefit of the organisation by a town hall employee, and Jean-François had been on the point of saying so.

"And I even can let you have them," Jean-François added.

\* This story belongs to the period when France was cut in two by a kind of inner frontier and when, in order to pass from one zone to the other, it was necessary to have a German safe-conduct.

† That is to say, without any nutritive value.



The housekeeper grasped the ticket-book with a kind of hard avidity and ran out to a bakery.

"You're not doing very well by yourself," said Jean-François to his brother, raising his voice. "And yet you were always a gourmand."

"I still am," sighed Luc, "but what are you going to do . . .?"

"What about the black market?" asked Jean-François.

"Old Marion is afraid of the gendarmes," said Luc. "And I . . ."

"And you, too, Saint Luc," said Jean-François with much friendliness and a touch of disdain.

They had their meal in the kitchen, which was the only room in which there was any fire. Luc kept on his coat and his cap.

"I'm storing up heat," he said.

"Well, I was so hot this morning I thought twice I was going to die," Jean-François exclaimed.

He stopped himself once again and explained,

"In those trains and crowded subways you nearly choke."

At this moment Jean-François remembered the second-hand furniture dealer and was sorry he had refused his invitation. Then he felt ashamed. He preferred a sausage to the company of his brother whom he had not seen for two years. But as Luc was questioning him on details of his trip, Jean-François realised that if he was thinking so regretfully about the dealer's back room it was because there he could have spoken about his false *Ausweis*s and had him admire the skill of the faking, and he could have revealed the origin of his bread ration tickets and above all he could have told him at length about his two adventures of the day and many other things and laughed with him at the German and French police. And the dealer whose shop served as a storage and exchange depot and letter-box would for his part have known a hundred good stories.

And Jean-François felt that the little second-hand dealer whom he had barely met was closer to him than the brother whom he had always cherished and whom he continued to cherish, but with whom he no longer had anything in common but memories. Life—real life, in all its warmth, in all its deep and powerful richness—he could share only with people like Felix or the Bison, or that tuberculous working girl who had hidden him for two days, or

like the locomotive engineer with the bright blue eyes in their sheath of soot who helped him to smuggle weapons through.

Jean-François had already experienced this feeling during the war, for his free corps comrades. But then he could talk about them and his existence among them to the whole of France. Now he must hide everything except from the companions of the secret war. And this made them, for Jean-François, the people among whom he felt he belonged.

Felix had allowed Jean-François three days in Paris, but the latter took the train for the South that same evening.

He later claimed that he had had a premonition.

#### IV

While Jean-François was having lunch with his brother in the Avenue de la Muette, Gerbier in Lyon was receiving Felix. Their meeting took place in a theatrical agency. The director had lent one of his offices to Gerbier who could in this way receive a procession of the most varied and strange-looking people without attracting attention.

The people who knew Gerbier and Felix best could not have discovered the slightest change in their relations. But they, since they had executed Paul Dounat, did not feel themselves altogether natural when they were alone together. This was why they spoke a little faster and in a somewhat more strained tone than they had done before.

"I sent for you because it's urgent," said Gerbier. "They've searched the premises of our friend the doctor in the southwest sector. The whole rest home was ransacked. By luck none of our people was in hiding there that day. He got out of it all right, but the place is spotted."

"I see. I see," said Felix.

"How many people in all do you have to embark for Gibraltar?" asked Gerbier.

"Well, the two Canadian Commando officers from Dieppe, as you know, and then three new fellows of the R.A.F. dropped by parachute and two Belgians, besides, who were among those sentenced to death by the Boches."

"And there is also one of our radio men who is going for a

course of training in England, and then a girl," said Gerbier. "That makes nine. Where are they going to wait for the submarine?"

"*Nom de Dieu*," said Felix, "the doctor's house was so handy. Another informing job of the S.O.L.\* or one of Doriot's men. I'll . . ."

Felix clenched his fists, but did not finish. His glance had met Gerbier's glance. And they had remembered Dounat.

"That's not the problem for the moment," said Gerbier quickly. "Where are we going to put them?"

"Can't we leave them scattered in the landscape in small lots?" asked Felix.

"No," said Gerbier. "They're already doing foolish things. The Canadian colonel goes to the café. He thinks he speaks French without an accent, and everybody knows what's what. The village population can be counted on, including the gendarmes. But if there should be a chatterer . . ."

"Or a drunk."

"And then the submarine is returning from operations," Gerbier continued. "Its passage will be signalled to us only the day before it leaves. They must all be together somewhere near by."

Felix slowly rubbed his bald spot till the tonsure became red.

"Then we'll have to make a reconnaissance of the region and find a property, an inn, a factory that will receive our people," said Gerbier. "Within forty-eight hours."

"It's risky," said Felix.

"I know," said Gerbier.

He thought of the telegrams which he occasionally received from London in which the general staffs expressed to him their astonishment at the organisation's delays and carelessness. And he added with a certain bitterness,

"We're not a company of insurance against all risks."

"With the conditions we're working under it's more the other way round."

"Everything depends on the man you choose for this mission," Gerbier resumed. "No need of an organiser or a great intelligence. It will take resolution, and especially a good, quick eye that will

\**Service d'Ordre Legionnaire*—A fascist paramilitary organization serving as a volunteer political police.

recognise people one can trust. It's a question of instinct."

"I see, I see," said Felix. . . . "And I've got a chap who is made to order. A comrade from the free corps. You've never seen him, but you know whom I'm talking about. He's got the nose of a hunting dog. Only he's in Paris. He had to deliver a new transmitting set to Dubois Deux this morning."

"And when will he be back?"

"In three days."

"Why not before?"

"He has a brother whom he hasn't seen since the war. . . . I didn't know we'd need him so soon," said Felix.

"Oh, this business of families! . . ." said Gerbier between his teeth.

"Was that for me, that remark?" Felix's voice was controlled, but so aggressive that Gerbier refrained from answering. Felix's eyes were burning from lack of sleep, the edges of his eyelids were red and his round face had an earthen colour.

"He doesn't sleep enough, his nerves are sick," thought Gerbier. "But none of us sleeps enough."

Felix, seeing that Gerbier was silent, broke out again with the same violence.

"If your reproach about the family is addressed to me it's going a bit far."

For a moment Gerbier did not know what he was driving at. Then he remembered and asked,

"How is the little boy?"

"Not well," said Felix. "The doctor found ganglions in his lung. . . ."

"You must send him to the country," said Gerbier.

"With what?" asked Felix. "You can realise that being constantly on the road as I am or else busy with a thousand things I haven't got a minute left to earn a few pennies. We just manage to eat, and that's only because my wife goes out as a housekeeper. And my wife has her pride. So she accuses me of being useless and lazy. And what can I tell her? And the kid hangs around all alone in the damp shop."

"You've never told me about that," said Gerbier. "We've got funds. . . ."

"Please, Monsieur Gerbier," said Felix. "Do I look like a

beggar, by any chance?"

Gerbier was absentmindedly making streaks in the wood of the desk at which he was sitting by running his fingernail along the grain. At this moment Felix, the garage mechanic, reminded him of Roger Legrain, the young tuberculous electrician of the camp of L. . . . The same dignity. . . . The same sense of honour. . . . Gerbier's silence, now, deeply embarrassed Felix.

"I didn't tell you all that to complain," he murmured. "I don't know what came over me. . . . When you spoke about family a while ago I thought of the fact that you, well, that you were alone, that you weren't tied to anyone. That's lucky in the kind of work we're doing."

Gerbier continued to streak the table with the end of his nail. He was not tied to anyone . . . that was true. He had come close to attaching himself to Legrain. But Legrain had refused to escape. . . . That was lucky. . . .

"So what do we do for this reconnaissance mission?" Gerbier asked brusquely.

"I'll go myself," said Felix.

Gerbier considered Felix's swollen eyelids, the unhealthy colour of his cheeks.

"You need a good night's sleep," said Gerbier.

"I don't care about that," said Felix. "But I swore to my wife and to the kid that I would take them to the movies to-morrow Sunday."

But Felix was able to keep this promise after all. He ran into Jean-François on the Paris-Nice express.

## V

The farm was situated half-way between the big national highway and the sea. The spacious outbuildings, solidly built in the old style, formed a kind of horseshoe around the main house on the property-side. Toward the sea horizon, almost to the water's edge, stretched cultivated fields, vineyards, clusters of trees. These lands were enclosed by low walls. Jean-François, sitting by a path with his bicycle lying beside him, was eyeing the farm. Of all the possible refuges that he had noted in the course of the day this one appeared to him in every way the most suitable. Jean-François

hopped on his saddle.

In the courtyard were chickens pecking the dirt and on the porch steps an old farm-hand was chopping wood.

"Where's the boss?" Jean-François asked him.

The old man straightened with difficulty in a series of movements, wiped his expressionless and perspiring face with the back of his patched sleeve and with his hand formed a kind of awning round his ear.

"I can't hear you," he said.

"The boss," Jean-François shouted.

The door opened and a woman in a black dress and shawl appeared. She was of middle age, small of build and held her head very straight.

"The boss isn't here, the boss is in town," she said with the sharp and lively accent of the region.

Jean-François smiled at the severe, regular face with its mat complexion.

"That doesn't matter, Madame," he said. "You're the real boss, I'm sure."

Jean-François was wearing a heavy turtle-neck sweater, a pair of old knickers, bicyclist's stockings and old sport shoes. His fair hair was windblown and fell in locks over his forehead. But because of his hands, his bearing and his voice the farmer's wife felt sure that he belonged to the well-to-do class.

"If it's for the black market it's no use," she said. "We haven't anything too much to sell."

"Well, you can give me a drink, anyway," said Jean-François. "My throat's on fire."

There was a fine coat of dust on the young man's eyelashes and forehead. The winter was very mild in the region. The roads were very dry.

"Come in," said the woman.

In the large living room there was a fire in the tall fireplace. The setting sun made the polished wood of the rustic old furniture gleam. From outside came the dry sound of splitting wood and the cackling of the chickens. The farmer's wife put a bottle and a glass on the table.

"Water would have been good enough," said Jean-François.

"Augustine Viellat has never refused wine to a passer-by, even

in these times of misery," said the woman proudly.

Jean-François drank slowly and the pleasure produced by each swallow was visible on his bright face.

"Another glass?" asked Augustine Viellat.

"Gladly," said Jean-François. "It's good wine."

"It's from our own land," said the farmer's wife.

She watched Jean-François drink and repressed a sigh. She had no son, and she would have liked to have a big boy like him, strong, handsome and simple.

"You fought in the war?" she asked.

"From beginning to end," said Jean-François, "in the reconnaissance corps."

"The reconnaissance corps," Augustine Viellat remarked, "were good soldiers, they say."

"They say," Jean-François repeated, laughing.

He suddenly got up, went over to the radio standing on a chest, switched it on and turned the dial to the London station.

"It's not the right time," said the farmer's wife.

She was standing beside the table. Jean-François came and sat down beside the woman on a corner of this table.

"Before nightfall I have to find a place to hide a few comrades," he said.

No change came over the woman's features but she lowered her voice to ask,

"Are they escaped prisoners?"

"They're British," said Jean-François.

"What do you mean, British?" exclaimed Augustine Viellat.

Surprise had caused her to raise her voice. And she glanced through the window with instinctive anxiety. She saw only the deaf farm-hand.

"Some are from the Dieppe affair and there are some airmen that were shot down," said Jean-François.

"Holy Virgin . . ." murmured Augustine Viellat. "Holy Virgin. . . British soldiers down here. . . I thought they were only in the North."

"That's where they began by hiding, all right," said Jean-François. "They've been wonderfully treated."

"I should hope so," said the farmer's wife. "British soldiers are at home everywhere in the good house of France."

Augustine Viellat had drawn her black shawl across her chest and the shawl trembled a little.

"So, if I bring them to you?" asked Jean-François.

"I shall thank you," said the farmer's wife.

"It's not without danger, I must warn you," said Jean-François.

"There is also with them . . ."

"I think you're really a little young, *mon petit*, to be giving me advice in my own house," Augustine Viellat broke in.

"And what about their safety?" asked Jean-François.

"My husband and my daughter think the way I do and the farm-hand was here in my father-in-law's time," said Augustine Viellat impatiently.

"There are seven or eight of us," said Jean-François.

"The house is big."

"What about food?" asked Jean-François.

"No one has died of hunger, thanks to God, even in these times of misfortune, at Augustine Viellat's," said the farmer's wife.

## VI

They arrived in small groups in two nights. The Canadian Commandos of Dieppe had passed through ten shelters; fishermen's cottages, country squires' chateaux, mountain hamlets, roadside inns. The two R.A.F. pilots, who were wounded, had been cared for in the home of a country doctor for weeks. The Belgian snipers had worked at felling trees as woodcutters. Finally Felix brought a taciturn Pole who had had all the fingers of his right hand broken by the Germans before he had escaped.

To bed these men in the attic Augustine Viellat had stripped all the beds of their mattresses and taken out of the chests the finest sheets in the house. To feed them she found raw hams smoked with herbs, preserved goose, eggs from the yard, salt butter, honey from the hills, and jams made on the farm with pure sugar. Her guests never knew that she was thus sacrificing all the reserves she had accumulated for a winter of famine and that she was giving up to them all her family's bread rations. This proud and despotic boss's wife cared for them with a solicitude full of timidity. They seemed to her to be somewhat fabulous beings. They came from so far away. They were still fighting.



"Be quiet," Augustine Viellat would say when they thanked her for some attention. "What would have become of us if it hadn't been for you?"

And they, who had received the same welcome throughout the whole of France, would smile and look embarrassed.

Jules Viellat, who had been rejected for service in 1914 and in 1939 because of his club-foot, kept repeating to himself, "And I'm doing my small share in the war, too, now." He sometimes said this, but only to his daughter Madeleine. To his wife he would not have dared. Madeleine who had black eyes and a Spanish complexion like Augustine did not know whether she was more in love with the tall, broad-shouldered and affable Canadian colonel or with a young pilot who had the face of a child. The Belgians made her laugh with their accent and their rather racy stories. The old farm-hand, because he was born in a frontier village, thought his bosses were sheltering smugglers. They let him believe it.

After nightfall everyone gathered to listen to the English broadcasts in the large farmhouse living room where everything—doors and shutters—was carefully closed. Augustine Viellat would gaze at those strange, foreign faces against the background of the old walls, amid the old furniture that had known only the same family of modest peasants, and shake her proud little head with incredulity. And when she thought that these men were soon going to leave in a submarine (they had said so: they felt so secure) it seemed to Augustine that she was already telling this story to the children Madeleine would have and that the little ones were listening to it as they would to a fairy tale.

This lasted about a week. Then one evening Jean-François came back. He announced that they were leaving the following night. Augustine Viellat drew her shawl tighter across her chest to conceal the fact that her hands were shaking. As they were about to separate to go to sleep Augustine detained Jean-François.

"I should like to have others if there ever was need," she said almost timidly.

Her request did not astonish Jean-François. Each time people began by chance to serve the resistance they were happy and wanted to continue.

Was it hatred for the enemy or a feeling of solidarity, or love

of adventure that thus found an outlet? Jean-François was not one to concern himself greatly over the answer. But he knew that through this training the entire country became people with precious relays and innumerable complicities.

"There's no lack of customers," said Jean-François smiling at Augustine.

His blue eyes alighted for a moment on the radio that Jules Viellat was listening to.

"And then," said Jean-François, "we might broadcast from your house."

"I don't quite understand," said the farmer's wife.

"We could talk to London," said Jean-François.

"Holy Virgin!" the farmer's wife exclaimed. "Talk to London! From our house! From our house! Do you hear, Jules? Do you hear, Madeleine?"

"Wait a minute," said Jean-François. "It means the death penalty." Jean-François could hear the breathings of the Viellat family in the big room with smoky rafters.

"What do you think, Jules?" his wife asked him.

"I want what you want," said Jules Viellat.

Augustine listened to the muffled noise of footsteps made in the attic by the Canadians, the Belgians, the British, the Pole as they were getting ready for bed and said,

"Then I'm willing."

"I'll talk to my chief about it to-morrow," said Jean-François.

Gerbier arrived before daylight. He had with him a radio operator, old and bearded, and an insignificant-looking young woman.

Jean-François took Gerbier aside and said to him,

"The fisherman will be waiting for us to-night from ten o'clock on. He has a big boat. He can take everybody. That will avoid several trips. The girl of the house will take you to the spot across the fields to avoid the patrols.

"It's well planned," said Gerbier.

"Do I go back?" asked Jean-François.

"No," said Gerbier.

He lit a cigarette and went on,

"I have a mission for you. A capital mission, *mon petit* (his voice was oddly gentle and penetrating). You will take the big

chief to the submarine. You understand, the big chief. He's leaving, too. And I don't want him to go aboard with the whole gang. It's risky. There are too many of us. You will leave with him—from another point—in a rowing-boat. The Bison will bring him to you. Wait for my signal when I'm on board. Three blue dots and a dash."

"I get it. I'll answer for everything," said Jean-François.

He was delighted. He loved to row.

Augustine Viellat went down to serve breakfast to the new visitors.

"As we shall be in a great hurry to-night, Madame, I should like to know right away what I owe you," said Gerbier to her.

"Oh!" Augustine murmured, "oh! how can you . . ."

"But look here . . . eight people for a whole week . . . in these difficult times," Gerbier insisted.

"What about you—do they pay you by the day for what you're doing?" Augustine looked at him hard. "No! Then I must tell you that, peasants though they are, the Viellats are as proud as you."

Gerbier thought of Legrain, thought of Felix and went into the kitchen to have breakfast. When he had finished he said to Augustine who had not deigned to give him a look,

"I should like you to allow me to bring you back something from London when I return."

"You . . . you're going to come back?" stammered Augustine, whose head was beginning to reel a little. "Do they do that, too?"

"Sometimes," said Gerbier.

"But it's much worse to begin again after having been in a free country."

"I don't know. . . . It's my first trip," said Gerbier. "And I should like to bring you back a souvenir."

Augustine took a deep breath and whispered,

"Arms, give me arms. The whole canton will be able to use them when the day comes."

## VII

The darkness was intense. Yet the ridges of the steep rocks that notched the cove could be half made out against the nocturnal

sky. A grotto formed the bottom of the wild, narrow cut in the form of a jagged arrow through which the sea penetrated the coast with its thousand twists and turns.

Jean-François was lying on the sand at the bottom of the cove and so close to the water that the longest waves wet his bare feet. He was wearing a pair of duck trousers rolled up to his knees, an old wool sweater, and felt wonderfully comfortable in his light, loose clothes. At regular intervals he would shut his eyes, the better to hear what was happening in the hollow of the night and the better to see afterwards. Jean-François had learned this in the reconnaissance corps during his watches, and he had learned to foil the mirages of the darkness that form enemies and fear out of nothing.

A light flurry lashed the sand. Jean-François was glad to feel it subside. He was not afraid of a heavy sea. Of all the exercises in which he excelled, nautical games were those he did best. He knew his strength. He knew his skill. Even in bad weather he was sure he could bring that skiff that lay within reach of his hand to the British vessel. But Jean-François preferred a calm sea for his passenger. Perhaps he did not have good sea-legs.

Jean-François shut his eyes and now he was nothing more than a kind of listening antenna. Nothing stirred around him but the waves. Very far up, on the road that wound along the broken coast, a motor droned feebly. It might be the Bison's car. Jean-François raised his eyelids. It was strange to think that the chief would soon take his place in the boat, and that he had the dimensions and the weight of the whole world. Felix's group, even Felix himself, had never approached him. He was without a name and without form and yet on his orders one went to prison, to torture, to death. He made arms drop from heaven and ammunition surge from the sea. His existence was enveloped in a kind of sacred cloud. His departures had all the magnificence of a theatrical wonder. Coming from no one knew where, he was about to be swallowed up by the sea.

And here Jean-François, who never thought about serious things, was going to serve as a ferryman to the big chief, to the one who planned, organised and commanded everything. Jean-François derived no feeling of pride from this, but a kind of gaiety. "The summit and the base of the pyramid meet," he

thought to himself. "A funny kind of mathematics. I'll have to talk to Saint Luc about it after the war." Jean-François felt himself smiling in the night. Poor Saint Luc with his wool cap, his yellow turnips, his fear of the gendarmes, while life was so beautiful, so vast, so . . .

Jean-François raised himself lightly on his elbows. All thought in him was suspended. He was certain he had heard someone moving at the point of the rocks which sheltered the cove on the right. The man must be extremely familiar with the terrain. He had made no more noise than a lapping of the water casting up a pebble. Now the silence was again complete. The boss was going to arrive from one moment to the next. And from one moment to the next the signal might flash in the night. That unknown watcher must not see them. Jean-François began to crawl along the beach. . . . He had in his hand a rubber bludgeon. Blended into the wet sand, light and slippery as a snake, Jean-François quickly made his way round the bend of the cove. He then perceived, between two blocks of stone, another block—as motionless, but of a slightly greyer shade. It was the man.

Jean-François secured the handle of his bludgeon well in the hollow of his palm. The blow on the watcher's head would not be deadly, but it would surely put him to sleep till dawn.

Jean-François advanced another few inches. He was well within reach and gathered his muscles. But the man abruptly disappeared behind a rock and Jean-François heard a muffled voice.

"No nonsense. I'm armed."

Two short waves broke one after the other against the point. Then the voice asked (and Jean-François felt that it had the habit of authority):

"What are you doing here at this time?"

"What about you?" Jean-François retorted, getting ready to jump over the rock.

"I am Augustine Viellat's brother-in-law," said the invisible interlocutor.

Jean-François let his whole body relax and murmured,

"Our farmer?"

The man came out of his hiding-place.

"I'm making a round to see if everything is going well with the embarkation."

"And how is it going?" asked Jean-François.

"Fine," said the man. "The gendarme patrol passed up above. The Boches aren't numerous enough and they don't know the country. They trust the customs."

"What about the customs?" asked Jean-François.

"What about it?" said the man. "It's damn good! I'm the customs! I'm the officer for the whole sector."

"I'll say it's good!" said Jean-François.

He put the bludgeon back into his pocket.

## VIII

Sparks of bluish fire rose above the water, flickered and disappeared. Jean-François saw the signal and was on his feet at the same time. Almost immediately, on the path that led from the road to the bottom of the cove, he heard heavy, awkward steps. The silence was such that the sound of each of these steps seemed to Jean-François to resound through the whole of France. He pressed the handle of his bludgeon and removed the safety-catch on the revolver he had in his pocket. His orders were to assure the departure at all costs.

After a few moments two shadows appeared and began to glide across the sand.

"Get aboard," said one of them.

Jean-François recognised the Bison's voice.

He pushed the boat into the water, keeping it as close to shore as he could, and used all his strength to steady it.

In spite of this the passenger got on board so clumsily that he nearly caused the skiff to capsize.

"He certainly wasn't trained in the free corps," thought Jean-François impatiently. He got the skiff back on an even keel and seized the oars.

"Good luck, chief," the Bison whispered.

Only then Jean-François remembered who the awkward passenger was. And the inexperience which the latter had shown before the elements struck him as infinitely touching and respectable.

"If he was like me he wouldn't be the big chief," said Jean-François to himself.

He no longer thought of anything but rowing the boat as fast and as noiselessly as possible. The passenger was sitting in the stern.

The signal flashed once again. The distance to be covered was considerable. But Jean-François' arms moved back and forth like well-oiled, regular push-rods. At last a vague form became outlined on the horizon, quite close. Jean-François gave a last smooth stroke with one oar. The boat made a quarter-turn and edged itself against the shell of a submarine that barely emerged above the water.

Someone on board leaned forward. The luminous sheaf of a strong flashlight suddenly flooded the whole boat. For the first time the two men who occupied it saw each other's faces snatched from the night. The one who was getting up with difficulty from the stern seat said in a subdued voice,

"*Mon Dieu* . . . little Jean . . . is it possible?"

And Jean-François recognised his elder brother.

"The chief," he stammered. "Listen . . . how . . ."

The flashlight was turned off. The night became blacker than before, impenetrable. Jean-François took a step blindly. As he was touching his brother the latter was lifted by invisible arms. The submarine moved off and plunged.

By a reflex Jean-François started his boat into the wake that was carrying his brother away. Suddenly, drained of strength, he abandoned the oars. The skiff slowly drifted. Jean-François had no idea how long it took him to understand and believe what had happened.

"That confounded Saint Luc. . . ." he finally murmured, "What a family! . . ."

Then he began to laugh and, singing softly, rowed toward shore on the dark sea.

## *"These People are Wonderful"*

Dinner was by candlelight. The candles were tall, slender and tea-rose coloured. The old lady never allowed any other kind of lighting when she had guests. To her friends she still looked a little like the portraits of her which were scattered through the rooms and which had been painted during the reign of Edward VII. The house overlooked Belgrave Square. The bombings had ruined many of the houses in the vicinity, but the old lady had consistently refused to leave hers. The servants being of an age that exempted them from military duties, she had been able to keep up her establishment on its normal footing and to indulge her old habits. One of these, formed in the time of the Entente Cordiale, was the holding of frequent gatherings of eminent Frenchmen in London. Without notifying her they could turn up at the last moment bringing new arrivals. The man beside me was one of these.

He had just come from France. He knew no one at this table, except the friend who had introduced him and who was seated at the other end. The conversation was substantial and brilliant but hinged on facts and persons he was totally unfamiliar with. He heard the words and not the language. He was visibly bewildered, like a traveller who lands on an unreal shore where the laws and the patterns of life are utterly unrecognisable.

This did not astonish me. I was in the same situation as my neighbour. Our common condition and solitude naturally attracted me to him. Aside from a curly mop of greying hair and a high, massive forehead, there was an unusual simplicity and gentleness about his features that made his face very appealing. His eyes were clear, a little tired, and these eyes rested by turns on the flowers, the decoration of the walls, the old servants, the candelabra, with an attention that was both studious and wonderstruck. One felt in him the constant presence of an intense meditation but also a leaning to the fanciful and a deep candour. His character and his



occupations had no doubt kept him out of touch with the ordinary cares and worries of existence. A professor. . . . A laboratory scientist . . . perhaps a botanist.

"Everything is surprising around us, isn't it?" I asked my neighbour.

"More than surprising," he said with warmth. "We have landed right in the midst of the miraculous."

His voice was a little weak, but it had great persuasive power.

"Life suddenly becomes so easy," he went on.

These words brought back a sense of vague discomfort which often oppressed me in London.

"Too easy," I said.

My neighbour gave me a look of friendly understanding (I subsequently noticed that he could look at people in no other way) and I had the feeling that the fresh candour of his contact with the world had its source not so much in naiveté as in kindliness.

"You are thinking of the conditions in which we live at home," he said, "and you are embarrassed here by the stacks of white bread . . . and the hot bath every morning with soap that lathers on the body."

He half closed his pensive and limpid eyes.

"I am undoubtedly immoral," he said, "but in all sincerity, I can't bring myself to feel any remorse. I accept things as they come to me."

My neighbour was one of those rare beings whose presence incites one to think aloud.

"You can't have left your ivory tower very often?" I couldn't help remarking.

"You mean that I'm a bookworm?" he laughed.

I shall never forget his laugh. It was barely audible, but its sound was so tender, so pure and so convinced, it cast such a beautiful childhood glow over the face of the grown man that I was filled with admiration and envy for one who at his age could laugh in this way. It was as though he were suddenly learning about the amusing things the universe had to offer and were laughing at hearing himself laugh. It had an extraordinary charm.

"What made you guess? The shape of my shoulders? My hair?" he asked.

He pulled with embarrassment at the bushy white tufts that

curled over his temples and said,

"It's too long, I know. But I just can't make up my mind to go to an English barber. I am so used to ours. They are wonderful people."

This sudden excitement, provoked by such a subject, struck me as a little absurd. I must have betrayed my feelings, for my neighbour began to laugh again. And as he kept rumpling his greying hair his laughter, that was so youthful, became even more engaging.

"I wasn't thinking of skill," he said, "really not. . . ."

He shook his head and continued,

"In Paris I regularly patronise a barber's shop on the left bank. It's a small place. The boss works there himself with two employees. His wife is in charge of the cash register. They have a little boy and a little girl who come and do their homework in the back room of the shop when they return from school. A family without a history. Well, one morning as I went in to my barber's he suddenly left the customer he was attending to, dashed over to another one who was waiting his turn, tore a printed sheet from his hands and came running up to me, shouting, 'Look, look what I've just received, Monsieur. I found this in my mail.' He was holding a copy of the clandestine paper, '*Libération*,' if I remember correctly. 'The articles in it are wonderful,' the boss said. 'Against the Germans, against the collaborationists, with names, details and everything. It takes courage to print things like that. Isn't that so, gentlemen?'"

"And everyone, those with their faces daubed with lather, those who were being worked on with the scissors or the clippers, everyone approved. The clandestine paper had made the round of the shop. 'Imagine their sending it to me. To me!' the boss kept saying. He was beaming with pride. 'It's really a great honour they're doing us,' his wife at the counter said gently. 'Read it fast,' the boss whispered to me. 'I'm expecting a lot of people this morning, and everybody has to get his chance at it.' For two cents he would have posted the paper in his window."

"Was it before or after the circulation of the resistance papers was punishable by death?" I asked.

"After, long after," said my neighbour.

He laughed. His face expressed the most astonished, the tender-

est admiration. One would have thought it was a brand new story to him. One would have thought I had just told it to him.

"Barbers are wonderful people," he affirmed.

Meanwhile the dinner was coming to an end. The butler was serving *crème au chocolat*. It was rich and light, smooth to the taste as to the eye. One had to be from France to appreciate this incredible thing to the full.

"Oh . . ." said the man beside me.

He stopped talking to give himself up entirely and in all innocence to the pleasures of the palate. Then he murmured,

"This dinner is a dream."

His serious and chimerical gaze passed slowly along the table at the end of which we were sitting. And, following this gaze, I became conscious again of the beauty of the flowers, the service, and the crystals, conscious of the charm of the soft flickering lights. This man's story had made me forget all that. But he seemed to have the gift of deriving unmixed pleasure from the blessings of a happy home and at the same time of keeping in his mind the secret torments and the efforts of a people at the mercy of a cohort of spies, gaolers and executioners.

"A real dream," said my neighbour. "We owe a great deal to this old lady, who does not even know us."

The mistress of the house sat very straight at the corner of the table. Her small, delicate head emerged from a collar of black organdie. This colour and this material set off the brilliant whiteness of her hair. Her eyes were still extraordinarily lively. We were sitting too far away to hear distinctly what she was saying, but the inflections of her lips were full of intelligence, of will and wit.

"Women are wonderful beings," said the man beside me.

And as I again mistook the occasion of his enthusiasm he added in a half-joking, half-guilty tone,

"You know, it's quite aside from any *crème au chocolat* . . . I remember a woman whose name was Mathilde and whose husband was a bailiff's clerk. I didn't know her, but I have often heard a student friend of mine speak of her."

("He is surely a professor," I thought to myself).

"This student's favourite pastime, when she travelled in the

*métro*, was to put anti-German tracts in the pockets of German officers and soldiers. She lived on the same floor as Mathilde in a kind of moderate rental barracks-apartment house built by the city of Paris for the *petit bourgeoisie*. But while the student led a carefree existence in her bachelor quarters, with perfect sexual independence, the bailiff's clerk, his wife and their seven children were suffocating in a three-room apartment. Mathilde was yellow, lean, worn out from her household cares and, perhaps because of this, was a woman of very aggressive virtue. Moreover my friend had anarchistic leanings and Mathilde, taking after her husband, was an *Action Française* fanatic. In short, they hated each other as only two women can.

"One day, in sheer fun, the student slipped a tract into Mathilde's coat. But the bailiff's wife was quicker than the soldiers of the occupation. You understand, she spent her life keeping an eye on her children, on her gas, seeing to it that she wasn't being robbed. She seized the girl's wrist and read the leaflet.

" 'At last I've got my hands on one of them, thank God!' said Mathilde.

"This took place in the stairway of the house. 'Let's go up to your apartment,' Mathilde ordered. My friend was most anxious to avoid a public incident. She obeyed.

"In the *garçonnière* the bed was unmade. Boxes and jars of make-up, very personal toilet utensils, empty bottles were scattered about. Mathilde was taken aback. 'I would never have thought . . .' she murmured. But the disgust which further lengthened her already long face suddenly gave way to an expression of prayer and humility. She seized the girl's hands with her two rough ones and said, 'Mademoiselle, you must help me!' 'Help you?' the puzzled student repeated. 'Against the Boches,' said Mathilde. And unexpectedly this utterly taciturn and rigid woman, who seemed as dried up in her feelings as in her features and her body, was carried away with passion. She told of her children's hunger, the futile food-lines, the torture of coal-less winters, her husband's lung congestion, the hunt for clothes and shoes that were not to be had. None of her words had a note of complaint. They expressed a fierce sense of revolt against the Germans. Mathilde's only despair was to remain inactive. But what could she do? She knew no one in the resistance groups. Her husband (a poor sort,

as she had come to realise) still believed in the Marshal. 'I want to work for the Boches' downfall,' Mathilde concluded. 'I won't consider anything too difficult or painful or dangerous. Those Boches have to croak and I want to do my part.' Not once in the course of this outburst had Mathilde raised her voice. But the violence of her words, the quivering of her thin lips and her waxen cheeks, the almost unbearable sparkle of her eyes that were habitually suspicious and dull carried more weight with my friend than cries would have done. 'You shall work in my circuit distributing our sheets,' she said. 'You will know nothing else and you will take orders only from me.' I imagine that on hearing the name of the paper and casting a last glance at the indecent disorder of the room Mathilde must have waged an obscure struggling against her conscience. But she accepted. She was entrusted first with a section of a street, then with the whole street, then with another, then with a whole district. It was an enormous task that she accomplished with method and with flawless attention to detail. She did not argue. She always had time for everything. She was never weary. She would go to the food-lines earlier. She would mend the clothes and the linen later. This was no one else's concern. Her husband knew nothing.

"Sometimes when she came in early to her next-door neighbour's to receive instructions she would find a strange man in the student's bed. 'A fighting comrade,' the latter would say. Mathilde would proffer an expressionless smile, listen to the orders and leave. She had grown still thinner, but her face no longer expressed hostility toward the world. She was especially happy when she had to add explosives to the thick bundles of printed sheets. And do you know how she went about taking these through Paris? She would put the newspapers and, when occasion required, the cartridges of dynamite at the bottom of the little carriage that she used for her last-born, an eighteen-month-old baby. Two of her older little girls would accompany her. They were stuffed with copies of clandestine literature under their smocks. Who could have suspected this hollow-cheeked, serious-looking woman taking her undernourished children out for a bit of air?"

Everyone had left the dinner-table and gone into a large drawing-room. So had we. But I had been quite unaware of it, so completely had my table-companion absorbed me in the story of that lean

figure of a woman with her faded, carefully mended clothes, who from morning till night, in all kinds of weather, wheeled a pale baby through the starved and tragic city of Paris on a bed of forbidden newspapers and explosives.

"Mathilde, however, was caught in the end through an indiscretion for which she was not responsible," said my table-companion. "Nothing could make her talk. When I left France the police had not yet decided her fate."

White-whiskered footmen were passing coffee, drinks, cigarettes and cigars. And my neighbour said,

"I don't smoke, but I like people around me to smoke Virginia or Havana tobacco. Especially here. Don't you think the smell goes with this place?"

He had the faculty of making me constantly teeter from one universe to another. But while his mind balanced and reconciled without apparent effort dramatically and almost monstrously contrasting visions, I found myself taking in this rich, warm room, this abundance, this security with a kind of metaphysical terror.

I was still so close to the French suffering and struggle, so marked by their climate, that that starved, oppressed, menaced and subterranean life seemed to me the most natural to man in these times. In mingling with the group formed around our hostess, helped by the compliance which slumbers in most beings, I could probably have forgotten, joked and smoked my cigar and drunk my whisky with peace in my heart. This had happened to me in London before. If I was kept from this now it was because of my companion. Yet I had no thought of leaving him.

"In the Rue de Lille in Paris," he said, "there is a perfect French replica of the mistress of the house. Her drawing-rooms are a little chilly, the meals lean, and the cigarettes are cut in four as everywhere. But in vigour, worship of traditions, spirit and despotic temperament my dowager countess is in no way inferior to this charming old lady."

"You frequent the Faubourg Saint-Germain?" I could not help asking.

"The countess has a Steinway with a marvellous tone," my neighbour answered, laughing. "I sometimes went and played at her house."

I looked at him with renewed attention. Why had I decided

that he was a man of the laboratory? His curly hair, his massive brow, his grave, ingenuous eyes, and the quality of his laugh? But all these features could just as appropriately, if not more so, be those of an artist.

Someone started a jazz-record on the gramophone hidden away in a corner of the immense room.

"One nice thing at least about this kind of music is that it doesn't prevent conversation," said my neighbour. "There used to be music—real music—in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but there was also conspiracy. The old countess had brought into play all the connections at her disposal, all the influences, all the suitors she had had in the course of a very long sentimental life, which was reputed to have been well filled. There were many high officials among these friends of another age. She would terrorise them, make them repudiate the Marshal, force them into commitments. The desk where her grandmothers hid notes written by Lauzun and the Duke of Richelieu was crammed with false identification papers, faked orders for missions, blank safe-conducts, letters of recommendation, for judges, police commissioners, prison directors. The countess shows an insane recklessness. But her rather comical despotism saves her. 'She's an old mad-woman,' people say and they leave her alone. . . ."

Another record. . . . Another jazz melody. . . . My neighbour continued,

"The countess has a grand-nephew of about thirty, with a flat, narrow chest, almost bald, full of pimples, who is constantly scratching his pimples with thin fingers, thin as filaments. Poor in his studies, rejected by the army, no profession, a small income. The very picture of the no-account son of a socially prominent family. He went into the resistance movement because he had always run errands for his grand-aunt. A wonderful fellow."

This time I protested.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said my neighbour, "this chap became the best of liaison-agents. In spite of his lamentable health he spent weeks on the train, without sleeping and almost without eating. He forced his way through barrages, smelled out traps. Ten times he went to a probable death, still scratching his pimples with his threadlike fingers. He was caught and pretty roughly handled.

They were unable to get a word out of him. The old countess managed to have him released. When he got back to her after leaving prison he could barely drag himself about. His pimples had become wounds. This was the only time he ever spoke about his feelings. 'I think no one will be able to accuse me any more of having been a slacker during the war,' he said."

This light cast upon a whole life so utterly surprised me that I was unable to repress an exclamation. My neighbour began to laugh.

"Isn't it an astonishing cure for an inferiority complex?" he asked me.

"You really know many people," I said, "and many of their secrets."

"My profession is one that calls forth confidence," said my neighbour.

His laughter had become even more silent than usual. Again I looked at the man intently and I thought "Might he not in fact be a neurologist, a psychiatrist?"

But while I was looking at his face inquiringly he suddenly turned aside and became inaccessible, as it were. Another record had been put on the gramophone and it was a Bach oratorio. There is in beauty a sovereign calming power. I found myself at last relaxing in this Belgrave Square drawing-room amid the sumptuous panelling and the trembling lances of the candles which were magically multiplied in the deep mirrors. And I was able to open this room and its luxury and its tranquility to that little barber, to those students, to Mathilde, to that unprepossessing son of a prominent family. And I loved them all the more for being there, hunted, ill-clad, underfed, chilled and drab, with the humble and sacred mystery of their courage.

The great movement of the organs had flowed past. Little by little the conversations resumed.

"The last time I played this Oratorio Thomas was listening," said my neighbour. "I have never had a friend like him and I have never met a man more pure in knowledge or more lofty in spirit."

My neighbour spoke in his habitual tone, which was fluid and calm. I understood nevertheless that his friend had died a tragic death. He guessed that I had understood.

"Yes," he went on softly, "Thomas was killed by a bullet in



the back of the neck, in the cellars of the Hotel Majestic. Yet he was in the provinces when the little group of scientists who together with him had been sending information to London were discovered and arrested. He could have hidden. But it seemed to him impossible not to share the fate of his companions. He came back to Paris, he claimed the heaviest responsibility and he was granted the wish to be executed last, after having seen his friends fall."

I quite naturally waited for my neighbour to add to this story the word "wonderful" which was as familiar to him as a tic. But this word did not come. No doubt at a certain degree of spiritual elevation nothing was astonishing to him any longer.

I remained silent and my neighbour began to laugh. I don't know how to make this felt, but it was impossible to honour a dead friend more highly than by this laugh.

And my neighbour went off, stooping a little, pushing back his grey curls with his hand.

Philippe Gerbier, who is an old comrade of mine, came up to me.

"Do you know the name of the man who is leaving the room?" I asked him.

"Let's call him Saint Luc," said Gerbier with his half-smile.

"You know him well?"

"Yes. He's our chief," said Gerbier.

He lit a fresh cigarette from the one he was just finishing and added,

"He will be in France in a few days, with the coming moon."

I quickly took my leave.

In the streets soldiers were tightly hugging girls in uniform. Joyous voices were hailing taxis.

The coming moon! The coming moon, I thought, looking at the sky streaked by the sheafs of the searchlights. The coming moon. . . .

I remembered the joy of this man, whose real name or whose real profession I did not know, before the *crème au chocolat*, the smell of Virginia tobacco. . . . And his face when he listened to Bach's Oratorio.

Shall I see you again, some day, my neighbour with the eyes of a child and of a sage, with the airy laugh, my neighbour—my "wonderful" neighbour?

## *Philippe Gerbier's Notebook*

Back from England yesterday. At the moment of plunging from the plane into the black night I remembered J. He had made a bad landing and broken both his legs. He nevertheless buried his parachute and dragged himself five or six kilometres to the nearest farm, where he was taken in. In my own case a rather acute stricture about the heart when the pilot signalled to me. Afraid for no reason. Not a bit of wind. Landed in a ploughed field. Buried the parachute. Knowing the region, had no difficulty finding the small local railway station.

Some peasants, workers, railwaymen, were waiting for the first train. At first, the usual conversation: food, food, food. Fewer markets, requisitions becoming intolerable, no fuel for heat. But also a new note: the deportations. Not a family, they said, which was not affected or about to be. They were thinking up ways of keeping their sons, their nephews, their cousins from going. A sense of being dragged off to prison. The rage of prisoners straining at their chains. An organic hatred. They likewise discussed the war news. Those who had a radio told the others all about the London broadcasts. I was reminded that I had spoken over the B.B.C. on behalf of the French engineers two days before.

Got off the train at the small town of C. I didn't want to rejoin our headquarters of the southern zone directly. The last telegrams sent to London were disturbing. Went to an architect friend of ours who treated me like a ghost. "You come from England, you come from England," he kept saying. He had recognised my voice over the radio. I didn't realise that it was so unmistakable. There I committed a rather stupid and serious blunder. Indiscretions are due not so much to malevolence, the temptation to talk or even stupidity as to admiration. Most of our people are carried away by their enthusiasm. They like to magnify, to create a halo around our comrades, especially the leaders. It keeps them going, rouses them and gives colour to their monotonous little

everyday work. "You know, X has done a magnificent thing," says one who is in the know to another. And the latter feels a need to share his enthusiasm with a third. And so on until the story reaches the ears of an informer. There is nothing so dangerous as this generosity of feeling.

So, because I've been to London I am in danger of becoming the object of a cult. I could tell this from the way the architect treated me. He is a man of substantial character and judgment. Yet he looked at me as though there were something a little miraculous about me. The fact that I came back did not greatly astonish him, but the fact that I had spent a few weeks in London, that I had breathed the air of London, that I had rubbed elbows with the people of London bowled him over. He considered that holiday, those days of comfort and security as an act of the rarest merit. Such an apparently absurd attitude is rather simple to explain. When everything seemed lost, England was the only source of hope and warmth. For millions of Europeans in the night it was the fire of faith, and all those who have come near this fire and still come near it take on a reflection of its wonder. Among the Mohammedans the pilgrim who has been to Mecca bears the title of Hadji and wears a green turban. I am a Hadji. I have a right to the green turban of enslaved Europe. This strikes me as rather absurd, because I haven't the slightest religious sense, but also because I happen to have come back from London. And there the point of view is exactly the opposite.

There admiration goes to those who are living in France. The hunger, cold, privations and the persecutions which we have had to get used to have deeply affected the imagination and the sensibility of the people across the Channel. As for those in the resistance movement, they arouse an almost mystical emotion. One feels the legend already taking shape. If I were to tell our people this they would shrug their shoulders. Never would a woman who grumbles for hours in queues, who weeps with impotence to see her children wasting away, curses the government and the enemy for taking her husband from her and sending him to Germany, who grovels to the milkman and the butcher to get a drop of milk or an ounce of meat, never would such a woman believe that she is anything out of the ordinary. And never would the lad who goes about every week with an old suitcase full of

our clandestine newspapers, the operator who taps out our radio messages, the girl who types my reports, the priest who gives us information, the doctor who looks after our wounded, and above all Felix, and the Bison, never would any of these people believe they are heroes, and neither do I.

Subjective opinions and feelings have no value. Truth lies only in actions. When I have leisure I want to keep a record for a time of the facts which a man whom events have placed in a good observation post can get to know about the Resistance. Later, with perspective, these accumulated details will add up to something and make it possible for me to form a judgment.

If I am still alive.

\*

Spent the night at the architect's. Had a visit from our local chief. A railway worker. A former union secretary. Very red. An excellent organiser. A staunch character. If all groups in the country were as united and resolute as the railway workers our political organisation wouldn't have much to do.

This man confirmed the bad impression I got from the telegrams. Searches, police raids, traps. The Gestapo is trying to decapitate the resistance. Ten times its blows miscarry, but they end by striking home. Our Command Posts discovered in Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse and in Savoy. Three radio stations seized. We don't know yet what is happening in the North, but down here it's serious. My second in command, a petty registry official, who was bilious and tireless, has been summarily executed. My secretary deported to Poland. Felix arrested.

Lemasque, it appears, has done very well. He has set up an emergency Post in his office. Little by little, as the others fell, this Post has become important. Lemasque has replaced the men who have been taken by new men. He has proved to be quick, energetic, efficient. But I don't trust his nerve. I came back just in time.

The railway workers advise me not to stay too long with the architect. He is too well known as a Gaullist. It's a small town.

\*

My present host is the Baron de V. and I live in a beautiful Louis XIII chateau. The estate includes a park, a wood, a pond,

rich and extensive lands. It would be hard to imagine a safer and more pleasant refuge. I shall be able to re-establish my liaisons and work out plans in peace. The Baron has put himself entirely at my service. He is a character. With his long nose, his complexion tanned by sun and wind, his hard little eyes, there is something both of the wolf and of the fox about him. He cares only for his domain and his hunting. A former cavalry officer, needless to say, whose wife and children live in terror of him. The only person who can stand up to him is his older sister, an old maid who is never out of her riding breeches. The Baron de V. was a sworn enemy of the Republic. Before the war he had organised his farmers, his kennelmen and his huntsmen into a squadron armed with hunting rifles and revolvers at the head of which he had planned to take the nearest Prefecture by a cavalry charge in the event of a Royalist uprising. This squadron, perfectly organised, perfectly trained, is still intact. But it will go into action against the Germans. There is no lack of weapons. Many parachutists have dropped on the baron's lands. He belongs to no underground organisation, but he helps them all. After his wife and children have gone off to bed he sets out with his sister, both of them on horseback, to look for parachutists.

It is to this feudal character that our sector leader, the secretary of the syndicate, has entrusted me. I teased the Baron de V. about his alliance with a revolutionary. His answer was, "*Je préfère, Monsieur, une France rouge à une France qui rougisse.*"\*

\*

News of Felix from Jean François.

Felix was arrested in the street by two men who spoke perfect French, but were agents of the Gestapo. He was questioned without being too badly beaten. As he would not admit his identity, three of the Gestapo took him to his house in the middle of the night. His wife and his little boy, terrified as they were and knowing nothing of Felix's underground activities, made no bones about recognising him. The German policeman beat him in front of his wife and child till he fainted. Then they began a search, smashing everything in the room. Felix came round again, but this time he didn't move. He had the presence of mind to lie still

\* "I prefer, Monsieur, a red France to a blushing France."

and recuperate, as Jean-François put it, and suddenly he dashed to the window, broke through the shutters and jumped into the street. His room was on the second floor. He sprained an ankle, but ran all the same. A patrol of French cyclist police was passing. Felix told the sergeant what had happened. They took him to one of our people. The next day he was in one of our clinics, the next in another, the next in still another. It was only there that the Gestapo lost trace of him. Felix has his foot in a light plaster and will soon be out. He has asked me for a new assignment. He won't be able to see his wife and child again till the war is over. He thinks his wife is very angry.

\*

A schoolteacher from Lyons has taken advantage of his Sunday off to spend two nights on the train and bring me the mail. He is asleep at this moment before taking the train back. He is so undernourished that he often forgets in his class the rudiments of what he is teaching. As for the children, he no longer dares send them to the blackboard. Their legs no longer carry them. They fall down faint from hunger.

\*

A country priest has come to say mass at the chateau. He spends his days and nights going from farm to farm. "You," he says to a peasant, "you have room to hide three men who refuse to go to Germany." "You," he says to another, "you must feed two more," and so on. He knows exactly what each one can do. He has a lot of influence and people obey him. He has been reported to the Germans and warned by the French authorities. "I have no time to lose," he says. "Before I go to prison I should like to place three hundred." It's become a kind of sport. A race against time.

\*

The number of those who refuse to work in Germany ran to a few thousand when I went away. To-day they can be counted by tens of thousands. Many are swallowed up by the countryside. But many have fled to the natural hiding places and occupy the maquis: the maquis of Savoy, of the Cévennes, of the Massif Central, of the Pyrénées. Each one holds an army of young people. They have to be fed, organised, and armed as much as possible.

It is a new and terrible problem for the resistance.

Certain groups have organised independently into communities. They sometimes edit a paper. They have their laws: a kind of tiny republic. Others salute the colours daily—the flag with the Cross of Lorraine. The next mail for England includes photographs of these ceremonies.

But most of these lads, young workers, students, clerks, need a strong and well-knit leadership, money and outside relations. Picked a committee of three from our organisation to look after them: Felix, Lemasque and Jean-François. They have virtues and faults which complement one another.

\*

Sent off a reception team for people and parcels coming from England. The team consists of a fireman, a butcher, a municipal secretary, a gendarme, a doctor. Means of transport: the gendarmerie car and the butcher's van.

\*

A good day:

1. A radio transmitter is operating at the home of the farmer's wife who gave us shelter before our departure in the submarine.
2. Felix has left the clinic with his ankle quite cured and a flourishing beard. He reports that he is in touch with Lemasque.
3. Mathilde has arrived.

She escaped with sixty suspects from the Palais de Justice in Paris, where they had been taken for questioning. She doesn't know how it was arranged, nor by whom. Inside accomplices, most probably. At a given word they had only to follow the corridors as far as the door leading to the Place Dauphine, open it and walk out.

Mathilde remained in hiding in Paris for three days. She resisted the violent temptation to see her children. She maintains that she never has done and never will do anything so hard. She showed me a photograph which she managed to hide through every search. Six children, from the oldest, a girl of seventeen, to the baby whom Mathilde wheeled around for so long, lying on piles of forbidden newspapers. "I'm sure my big Thérèse will take good care of the little ones," Mathilde said. "I won't be able to

look after them till the war is over." She took back the picture and hid it again. The way she did this gave me the feeling that it would be a long time before she looked at it again. She has asked for work right away, lots of work, dangerous work. I said I would think it over. I know she can do a lot and do it well. I must find the best possible use for her. Meanwhile she is staying at the chateau.

\*

Examined many reports.

For the people in the resistance the margin of life is constantly growing narrower. The Gestapo arrests multiply and the German courts impose the death sentence more and more rigorously. And now the French police automatically surrender the Frenchmen they hold whenever the enemy demands it. Before there was prison, the concentration camp, forced domicile, or even a simple warning from the authorities. To-day it is nearly always death, death, death.

But on our side we kill, kill, kill.

The French were not prepared, not disposed to kill. Their temperament, their climate, their country, the state of civilisation they had reached turned them away from bloodshed. I remember how difficult it was for us, in the first period of the resistance, to contemplate murder in cold blood, ambush, planned assassination. And how difficult it was to recruit people for this. No question of any such repugnance now. Primitive man has reappeared in France. The Frenchman kills to protect his home, his daily bread, his loved ones, his honour. He kills every day. He kills the German, the German's accomplice, the traitor, the informer. He kills for a reason and he kills, by reflex. I would not say that the French people have grown hard, but their edge has been sharpened.

\*

Coming from Paris, Mathilde travelled a part of the way with the dowager Countess at whose house the chief used to go and listen to music. The Countess had with her a young British machine-gunner, who had been in hiding until then. In changing trains they had to spend two hours in a waiting-room. Suddenly there was an inspection of identity papers. The Englishman had none. He did not know a word of French. The old lady made him



crouch on the floor and sat on top of him, spreading her long, full, old-style skirts all around him. The police saw nothing. There was general co-operation on the part of the passengers, naturally.

\*

Long talks with Mathilde. I knew from the chief that she was a remarkable woman, but even so she astonishes me. She was born to organise, to command and at the same time to serve. She sees things in straight, simple terms. Her will, her sense of method, her patience and her hatred of the German are all equally strong. Now that all her family ties have been cut by the enemy she has become a formidable instrument against him.

In prison Mathilde learned a lot about disguises, the ways of escape, the technique of assassination. I am taking her on as my second in command. She is going to tour the whole Southern Zone to make contact with the sector leaders. She will rejoin me in a large town. The liaisons here are much too slow.

\*

Was it accident, luck, premonition or instinct? I left the chateau a week ago. Two days after my departure the Baron de V. was arrested at the same time as our sector leader. Both have already been shot.

\*

France is a prison. Menace, wretchedness, anguish, misfortune hang over it like a heavy vault which is collapsing and which every day comes closer to our heads. France is a prison, but illegality provides an extraordinary means of escape. Identity papers? We manufacture them. Ration cards? We steal them from the town halls. Cars, petrol? We take them from the Germans. Obstructionists? We suppress them. Laws, regulations no longer exist. Illegality is a shadow that slips through their network. Nothing is difficult any longer because we began by what was most difficult of all, by neglecting the essential: the instinct of self-preservation.

\*

A travel scene.

My train stops at the Toulouse Station longer than it should. Gestapo agents examine our identity cards. They are in my coach (third class). They are in my compartment. Nothing happens. Their footsteps recede. But another police agent comes along and signals to one of the passengers to follow him. The passenger turns his back to the German, stoops as if to pick up the newspaper he has dropped. And we all see him take a revolver from under his armpit, remove the safety catch and put it back in his coat pocket. All this quite naturally and very fast, with perfect calm. The passenger picks up his suitcase and goes out. The train does not start. In our compartment we all sit in silence. The train gets under way. The passenger reappears. "They made a mistake," he says as he gets back into his seat. He cuts a cigarette in two and smokes one half. Conversation is resumed in the compartment.

\*

A travel scene.

In the corridor of a third-class coach, where people are jammed together, a young girl keeps casting a quick glance at a rather voluminous parcel wrapped in cheap paper and lying a few yards away from her. The travellers shuffle their feet, jostle each other as people get on and off at the train stops. The parcel tears and bursts open. The girl moves off. The contents of the parcel scatter over the floor. Piles of clandestine newspapers. The travellers pick them up. The girl has disappeared.

This is the result of the shortage of suitcases, of strong paper and string.

\*

A resistance group removed many of the sewer gratings in Marseille one night-fall. The Germans and their friends being the only ones having the right to go out after the curfew, there was no one to regret among those who suffered broken bones at the bottom of the sewers.

\*

At all the big railway stations, the Gestapo and the French police who are under their orders post men gifted with an exceptional visual memory, who have carefully studied the photographs of the

patriots they are looking for. They are "physiognomists" like the employees we used to see in the doorway of the gambling rooms in big casinos, whose job was to remember the faces of all the players.

\*

The Gestapo likes to employ elderly, meek-looking men with a decoration in their button-holes to do their shadowing. People are less suspicious of these greying gentlemen. When you are shadowed by one of these the danger is not yet immediate. But if you then see some younger and stronger men appearing in his wake, you must expect the worst.

\*

I am living in a big city, at the house of a *juge d'instruction*, as his servant. It's a good blind. Unfortunately I always have to see a great many people. Such coming and going in a quiet household is quickly noticed. I shall not be able to stay here long.

\*

Mathilde has come back from her tour. She has given me a complete report on our sector. She saw everyone. She spent every night in trains. It's less tiring, she claims, than looking after a large family when you are poor. To tell the truth she no longer looks like a housewife. I think her new way of life and a kind of cold, desperate fury have transformed her expression and her way of moving. But she has been working at it as well. She told me that she changed her personality several times in the course of the trip. Sometimes she would powder her hair and wear an austere black dress, at other times she would use a lot of make-up and dress conspicuously. "I change fairly easily from the old lady bountiful to the old tart," she says in her matter-of-fact way.

One of the most important things she did was to establish relations with the local chiefs of the other groups to avoid overlapping and interference in operations. It sometimes happens that two or three different organisations are simultaneously working for the same objective: sabotage, train-wrecking, a raid or an execution. If there is no contact the number of men involved in an assignment is uselessly multiplied, and so are the risks. And

that makes one or two squads that might be used elsewhere. It is important, moreover, to avoid the risk of a minor operation bringing the police down on a district where a more extensive operation is in preparation. On the other hand the exchange of plans increases the chance of leakage and indiscretion.

This is the eternal problem of underground life. It is impossible to make recruits, to act, without taking people into one's confidence, and yet to take people into one's confidence is dangerous. The only remedy is to partition everything to limit the damage. The communists are the great masters of partitioning, as in everything connected with the underground life. Mathilde has come back full of admiration for the strength, the discipline and the method which she found among them. But short of working underground a quarter of a century there is no way of catching up with them. They are professionals, we are still paying our apprentice fees.

\*

Mathilde has found an attic in the house of a little dressmaker. She said she was a nurse. To-morrow she will have her papers. She is going to direct one of our fighting units.

\*

I am still with the *juge d'instruction*. He is nothing more in the organisation than a friend ready to help. But a friend one can count on. He has just examined a Gaullist affair in which four of our people are under accusation. One of the four when arrested made a confession which brought the other three behind the bars. The judge was able to persuade the denouncer to go back on his statement and to put it down entirely to the brutality of the police—which is only too real. The judge said to him "My findings will get you the lightest possible sentence."

In fact, he has done everything to keep the informer locked up as long as possible. We have no prisons at our disposal. It's just a bit of luck that we can occasionally use the Vichy ones for our own benefit.

Every evening the judge would keep me posted on how the affair was going. The three comrades will know how they were freed only after the war. . . .

If they—and I—are still alive.

The chief is in Paris.

I relayed to him verbally, via Jean-François, the contents of a large stack of mail. Jean-François is back. The chief agrees that Felix, Lemasque and Jean-François take charge of the maquis on the spot. He approves of my having entrusted Mathilde with her present post.

\*

On his way to Paris Jean-François was carrying a valise full of tracts. He had also put a ham in the valise. He feels sorry for his brother. As a matter of fact, the chief is dying of hunger. . . . In the street Jean-François was suddenly grabbed by a *garde mobile* and had to open his valise. The guardsman examined the contents thoroughly. His face wore a hard look. Jean-François was preparing to drop it and run. But the guard merely said to him, "You oughtn't to mix up the black market with the business of fighting the Boches. It's not right." When Jean-François told his brother the story, the chief was deeply moved by it. Much more than by the adventures in which so many of our people lose their lives.

\*

The Gestapo has enormous sums at its disposal for its informers. We know a small town of ten thousand population where the Gestapo-budget is a million francs a month. With that it has been able to buy four well-placed informers. It would be easy to liquidate them, but I think it's better to keep them for the final settlement. Traitors whose faces are known are less dangerous.

\*

We have friends everywhere in the enemy camp. And I even wonder if the enemy suspects how numerous, active and well-distributed they are. I'm not even speaking of the Vichy organizations. There is not one sub-prefecture, town hall, police-station, food board, prison, commissariat or government office where we haven't some of our people installed. Each time one of our comrades is in danger of being handed over to the Gestapo, Laval himself finds a note on his desk warning him that he will be held responsible for our comrade.

With Vichy it is not so difficult. But even among the Germans we have our "entrées."

The Bison is still unbeatable. Mathilde asked him for four German uniforms. The Bison got them. That means for certain the death of four German soldiers. We will never know how the Bison did it. He has the discretion of a Foreign Legionary.

Mathilde amazes him and inspires his respect. He says of her, "She's somebody."

\*

Have moved again. Have taken an apartment under a fifth alias. My papers: A Colonial officer on leave. Inoculation against malaria. Mathilde, as a nurse, comes to give me the injections.

L., who is in General de Gaulle's organisation, has arrived from London. This is his fifth trip. He had had a pile of work before leaving. Two sleepless nights. The plane trip. Parachute. Twelve kilometres on foot. The train in the early dawn. Falls asleep. His head bumping hard against his neighbour he wakes up. He thinks he is still in England. He says, "Oh, I'm so sorry." He rubs his eyes: his neighbour was a German officer. No serious consequences.

\*

The last time he left for London, L. took his family with him. They were no longer safe. The family included his wife, three little girls (aged ten, six and four) and an eighteen-month-old baby. This is L's story:

"I had made arrangements with a fisherman who was anxious to get to England. He made a false deck on his boat. In the morning before going on board I woke up my daughters. It was still dark. I told them to make no noise and to say their prayers with more attention and faith than usual. Then I told them that we were going to take a dangerous sea trip and that we might never see one another again if God was not with us. The boat was anchored in a small river. We slipped into our hiding place and we started off. At the estuary we had to submit to the German customs inspection. I could hear their boots and I felt as though they were tramping on my heart. I was lying on my back and I held the baby in my arms. If he had uttered a cry, a moan, we would have been lost. I spoke in his ear and I am sure he understood. The inspection took a long time. He did not make the slightest sound.

"When we were settled in London I thumbed through a kind

of diary that my oldest daughter, the girl of ten, keeps very regularly. She has told very well the story of the awakening in the night, the prayer and my warnings. She concluded, 'we who are used to those things were not surprised.' "

\*

Mathilde's first operation.

One of our most useful group leaders had recently been moved from the prison where he was held to a hospital. Yesterday evening an ambulance with four German soldiers and a nurse drew up before the hospital. The nurse showed an order from the Gestapo to hand our group leader over to her. Neither Mathilde nor her men had to use their weapons.

\*

Felix, Lemasque and Jean-François are working all-out to organise a few mountain shelters where men who have refused to be deported are in hiding.

Visited Lemasque's sector.

I am not given to emotion, but I don't think I shall ever forget what I saw. Hundreds and hundreds of young people returning to a state of savagery. They can't wash. They can't shave. Their long hair hangs over cheeks burned by sun and rain. They sleep in holes, in caves, in the mud. Food is a terrible daily problem. The peasants do what they can, but it can't go on indefinitely. Their clothes fall off in tatters, their shoes go to pieces on the rocks. I saw boys shod with sections of old tyre or even strips of bark tied to their feet with string. I saw others who had on nothing but an old potato sack split in two and tied round their waist like a loin-cloth. It is becoming impossible to tell where these boys come from. Are they peasants, workers, clerks, students? They all wear the same hunger, the same wretchedness, the same hardness and the same anger on their faces. Those whom I visited were well disciplined under Lemasque and the helpers he had chosen. We get as much food and money as we can. But there are thousands of fugitives in the various "maquis." No secret organisation can take care even of their most elementary needs. Must they then die of hunger or take to looting or give themselves up?

And winter has not yet come. Woe to those who put such a choice before our young men.

\*

Lemasque has made amazing strides. The duties he had assumed when I was in London, his present job have taught him decision and authority. He controls his nerves. His enthusiasm is held in leash but shines through like a muffled fire. He exerts an unmistakable, powerful ascendancy over the instinctive kind of people he commands.

I have no time to see the territories under Jean-François' and Felix's supervision. I have to make an urgent report to London on this inspection by the next mail.

\*

Felix has sent me a liaison agent with a whole list of things needed in his "maquis." At the bottom of the list the following note:

"Vichy has sent a company of *gardes mobiles* into this region to hunt us out. I have made contact with the captain. We have talked things over and we understand each other. He said to me, 'Don't be afraid. I was an officer of the Republican Guard. I took my oath to defend the Republic. To-day the Republic is in the maquis. I shall defend it.'"

\*

Mathilde has made a discovery which definitely confirms certain information about which we were not quite sure.

The dressmaker where Mathilde has taken an attic has a son of about twelve. Like all town children in our time he has a grey complexion, flabby muscles and a famished look in his eyes. He is very gentle and has great delicacy of feeling. Mathilde is very fond of him. This little boy works as a page at the Hotel T. The job is a good one, not so much for the wage that he gets as for the scraps from the restaurant that he is sometimes given. Mathilde was invited to share some of these feasts. She says nothing was more pathetic than to see the little boy pretending that he wasn't hungry so as to give as much as possible to his mother, and the mother enacting the same comedy when neither could take their eyes off the food.



Well, lately the little boy has been sleeping terribly. He would moan, weep, scream and choke in his sleep. The shivering fits that came over him were almost convulsive. He seemed delirious and he would call out, "Don't hurt her . . . Don't kill her. . . . stop, *please* stop crying like that."

The frantic mother consulted Mathilde, whom she still takes for a nurse. Mathilde spent part of the night listening to the boy's nightmares. Then she woke him gently. She asked him questions. A woman who has had as many children as she has and who has loved them as much knows how to talk to youngsters. The dressmaker's son told her everything. About a week ago he was put at the disposal of the guests who occupy the fourth floor of the hotel where he works. He has to stand by on the landing and answer the bell. The whole floor, he says, is occupied by gentlemen and ladies who speak French well but are all Germans. They receive a lot of people. There are men or women who always come between two German soldiers. And these French people always have an unnatural look in their eyes, as if they were afraid and didn't want to show it. And they are always taken to the same room, No. 87. Almost always cries and peculiar noises and moans can be heard in this room. The noises stop and then go on again and again. "Till it makes you sick, I swear to you, Madame," said the child to Mathilde. "The voices of the women they are hurting are worse than anything. And if you could see the state they're in when they bring them back. Often they are taken into another room, and then brought back. It begins all over again. I didn't want to talk to anybody about it because I'm afraid to think about it."

That is how we located the torture chamber for this town.

\*

The following day Mathilde asked what advice I would have given the dressmaker about her son.

"Why, to take him away from the hotel right away," I said.

"Well, I persuaded her to let him stay on," said Mathilde. "It is so valuable to have a spy in such a place. Especially an innocent one."

Mathilde's lips contracted and she gave me a sad, questioning look. I was forced to tell her she was right.

A severe blow for our newspaper.

It was set up in several different print shops, each turning out its portion. In this way the typesetters who worked for us could do it fast and weren't noticed. Then the leads were carried the same day to a letter-box that stood among ten others in a row in a hallway. The comrade who lived in the house and used the letter-box would take the leads and bring them to another printer's where the newspaper was printed. Yesterday the bottom of the letter-box, too old apparently, gave way and the leads fell all over the hallway floor. A fool of a tenant who was passing thought that they were explosives (nearly every day there is a bomb outrage in the town). The tenant notified the police. Our friend is in a cell. The Gestapo have already demanded that he be turned over to them.

I think he will resist the ordeal of room 87. But in any case we must change all our printing places. Now with the German tortures we must observe a strict rule. As soon as a comrade who knows something is arrested we must assume *a priori* that everything which he knows the Gestapo also knows. I am changing my name and my address.

\*

The captain of the *gardes mobiles* has kept his promise to Felix. He has not found a single deserter from deportation in the maquis. He does, to be sure, execute a daily round of the woods and the valleys, but he makes a point of sending out a motor-cycle scout ahead of time who creates an infernal racket. This gives everyone warning. But the captain has just advised Felix that two officers of the S.S. have arrived to superintend and direct the manhunt.

\*

A brothel-owner said to one of his friends who operates a bar, "My house has been requisitioned by the Boches. It has never been worked so hard. But I don't want this money. It burns my fingers. I should like to use it against the Boches."

The bar-keeper communicated this wish to the Bison, who in turn confided it to Mathilde. She saw the brothel-owner.

"How will I know it is really being used against the Boches?" he asked her. "We will put out an agreed phrase over the London

radio," Mathilde answered. We sent the phrase on. It was repeated by the B.B.C. We have received 500,000 francs. What is more, the brothel-owner has put a wonderful estate at our disposal. An old general who has helped us a lot through his connections in the army and who is being hunted by the police has already taken refuge there.

\*

An adventure of Felix's.

The captain of the *gardes mobiles* gave warning that the two S.S. officers were beginning to suspect the trick he was playing and that he would not be able to resist their pressure much longer. Felix set himself to studying the movements and habits of the two Germans. The company of the *gardes mobiles* is billeted in a fair-sized village. The two Germans have rented a chalet on the mountain slope. Getting up very early they always go and have breakfast in a little inn situated between their chalet and the village. The path that leads to the inn has high embankments on both sides and at one point makes a sharp bend. It was a perfect spot for an ambush.

Felix has a tommy-gun in his armoury. He could finish the Germans off alone. But in the village there are two stout fellows who tell all and sundry that they are ready to do anything against the Germans. One is the postman, the other the harness-maker. Felix decides that this is his chance to try them out. If they are just café-braggarts it is better to know where you stand. If they are really able to act, they must be brought in. Felix suggests the job to the postman and the harness-maker. They accept.

At dawn the three men are at the bend in the path. Felix has his tommy-gun, the postman and the harness-maker their revolvers. The sun is coming up. The Germans approach. They are talking in their own language and laughing very loud. They have no anxiety. They are the masters in a conquered country. Felix appears and points his tommy-gun on them. The two officers look for a second at the short bearded man with his round red face. They put up their arms.

"They understood right away," Felix told me; "their faces didn't even move." Felix had only to press the trigger to finish them. But he wanted the postman and the harness-maker to

prove themselves and pass their apprenticeship. He ordered each of them to kill a man. They came up and fired several shots, closing their eyes a little, it appears. The Germans fell without losing their composure, quite simply. Their grave was prepared in advance. Felix and his accomplices threw the bodies in and put the squares of turf back on top. Except for these three men no one will ever be able to find the corpses of the two S.S. officers.

"It was a clean job," said Felix, "but between you and me, it sort of upset me. Those bastards really had guts. And that look they gave when they realised what was up sort of hit me in the stomach. We hid our arms and those of the S.S. and went and had coffee in the bistro where the Boches were going. I wondered how the postman and the harness-maker would react because I myself, though I have seen some pretty bad things, still felt a little yellow about the gills. Well, by Jove, they swallowed the black juice perfectly calmly and before long they were both snoring on the bench. In the afternoon the postman started off with his letters and the other went back to selling his junk as if nothing had happened."

Felix rubbed his bald spot and remarked, "They've certainly changed, the French."

\*

The chief will be delighted by the postman and the harness-maker. This man of exceptional intelligence and culture only likes stories of children and simple people.

\*

I am lodging with a young couple of very modest station. He is a clerk at a silk merchant's and spends his nights travelling for us as a liaison agent. His wife waits in queues, does the cooking, looks after the house and acts as my secretary, which forces her, too, to spend sleepless nights. She has rather frequent fainting fits. I mentioned them to the husband. He finds that quite natural. Yet he loves his wife. But our work comes first.

\*

I think that among those in the underground movement an evolution is in process which is in inverse ratio to temperament

Those who were gentle, sensitive and peace-loving are getting hardened. Those who were hard as I was, as I still am, become more permeable to feelings. How to explain this? Perhaps the people who saw life through rose-coloured glasses are defending themselves with a kind of inner shield against the contact of the often frightful realities which the resistance reveals. And perhaps people like myself who took a rather pessimistic view of mankind are discovering through the resistance that men are better than they thought.

The chief alone still remains true to himself. I think he must long ago have assessed the possibilities of good and evil which each human being unconsciously holds within himself.

\*

A long talk with Louis H., chief of a group with which we often co-operate. We first discussed a very specific matter, Louis H. has three men in a concentration camp whom he highly values. The Gestapo has demanded the surrender of these three men. They are going to be handed over to the Gestapo by train in four days. Louis H.'s organisation has had terrible losses in the last month, and he no longer has enough men to try to free his comrades. He came to ask me if we could undertake the operation. I shall give the necessary orders.

Then, without wishing it, as old schoolmates, regimental or war comrades do, we let ourselves drift into reminiscences. Both of us are veterans in the resistance. We have seen much water and blood flow under the bridges. Louis H. has worked out that of four hundred members who formed their original group only five remain who are still alive or at large. If we have a greater proportion of survivors (a matter of luck, perhaps of organisation), the loss is nevertheless dreadful. And the Gestapo strikes ceaselessly, ever harder and closer. But the enemy can no longer succeed in suppressing the resistance. It's over, it's too late. Louis H. and I decided that if a year ago the Germans had shot or arrested a thousand well-picked men, they would have cut off the leadership of our groups and disorganised the resistance for a long time to come, perhaps till the war was over. To-day that's impossible. There are too many cadres and sub-cadres, volunteers and accom-

plices. They could deport all the men, yet the women would remain. And there are some astonishing ones. The resistance has taken the shape of the Hydra. Cut off one head and ten grow in its place with each gush of blood.

\*

After Louis H. has left I fall into a fit of depression. It is not well to count the missing. And then I really haven't been sleeping enough for a long time. I think of Mont Valerien where *every day* men are shot, of that estate of Chaville where *every day* a lorry brings victims to face the firing squad, of the rifle-range of Z. where *every day* our comrades are machine-gunned.

I have thought of the cells of Fresnes, of the cellars of Vichy, of room 87 in the hotel T. where every day, every night, they burn women's breasts, break toes, stick pins under the victims' nails, send electric currents through their sexual organs. I have thought of the prisons, and of the concentration camps where people die of hunger, of tuberculosis, of cold, of vermin. I have thought of the team of our underground newspaper, completely renewed three times over. Of sectors where not a man, not a woman remains of those who saw the work begin.

And I asked myself as a hard-headed realist, as an engineer who draws a blueprint: Do the results we are able to obtain justify these massacres? Is our newspaper worth the death of its editors, its printers, its distributors? Do our little sabotages, our trifling assassinations, our humble secret army which perhaps will never go into action, do they outweigh our frightful losses? Are we, the leaders, justified in arousing, training and sacrificing so many good, brave people, so many trusting, impatient, exalted souls for a battle of strangulation, for a struggle of secrets, of famine and of torture? In short, are we really needed for victory?

As a realist, as an honest mathematician, I had to face the admission that I did not know. And even that I did not think so. In figures, in a practical accounting, we are running at a loss. Then, I reflected, then we must in honesty give up. But at the very moment when the thought of giving up came to me I felt that it was impossible. Impossible to leave to others the responsibility, the whole weight of defending and saving us. Impossible to leave

the Germans with the memory of a country without resilience, without dignity, without hatred. I felt that an enemy killed by us who have neither uniforms nor flag nor territory, I felt that the corpse of that enemy weighed more heavily and more effectively in the scales which hold the destiny of nations than a whole holocaust on a field of battle. I realised that we were waging the most glorious war of the French people. A war of little material use since victory is assured us even without our help. A war to which no one compels us. A war without glory. A war of executions and assassinations. In other words, a gratuitous war. But this war is an act of hatred and an act of love. An act of life.

"For a people to be so generous with its blood," said the chief one day with his voiceless laugh, "proves at least that its corpses are red."

\*

A communist girl said to me,

"My comrade, an insignificant bit of a woman, was so tortured at the Santé that since she escaped she always carries poison. You understand, she couldn't go through that again. She would rather die. So she asked the party for poison in case she should be caught again. Because, you see, giving up working against the Boches is out of the question. One might as well die right away."

\*

Spent the day in the country with the owner of a large vineyard.

He said to me among other things,

"Whenever you need a tank, let me know."

I learned that during the retreat of our armies he had picked up an old Renault tank. He had driven it into one of his garages and had walled it in. I didn't have the courage to tell him that his old scrap-heap was worthless. He was so proud of it. And besides, for this tank he had risked his life, a life of pleasure and ease.

\*

Mathilde and the Bison have left to organise the escape of the three prisoners with which Louis H. entrusted us.

An adventure of Jean-François.

The maquis region where Jean-François is working is not very far from a good-sized town where he often goes for provisions, liaisons, false papers, etc. He has gone too often, I suppose, for he was arrested there by the French police as he got off the train.

From his brief experience in the reconnaissance corps Jean-François has kept a taste for hand-grenades, of which he had three in his suitcase. As his two captors and he were making their way with the crowd of passengers through the narrow station exit, Jean-François was able to open the lock of his suitcase and dump the contents on the ground. In picking them up again he managed to slip the grenades into his pockets. While he was being taken to the Commissariat he stooped down twice to tie his shoe-laces. The grenades were left in the gutter.

The police then grew a little suspicious of his movements and handcuffed him.

"Take those off for a moment so that he can sign his deposition," said the *commissaire* when Jean-François was brought before him. Hardly were the handcuffs off when Jean-François' two arms shot out and struck the officers on each side. They managed to seize him as they fell, but he shook them off, pushed the commissaire away and ran for the door of the police station. A priest was just entering at this moment.

"Stop thief, stop thief!" yelled the two policemen who had started after Jean-François. The priest blocked the doorway.

"Gaullist! Gaullist! . . ." cried Jean-François.

The priest let him pass and immediately barred the way for the two officers. They rolled all together on the doorstep. While the officers were extricating themselves from the priest's cassock Jean-François turned down one street, then another and still another and was at last out of reach.

But for how long? They had his description. His jacket had been torn in the struggle. By going to the home of any of the people he knew he ran the danger of putting the police on the track of the whole local organisation. He must leave town as quickly as possible. But the station was more closely watched than any other spot. Jean-François decided to leave on foot, but first he had to change his appearance. He went into a barber's shop that was empty and called for the owner, who came shuffling out of



the back room in his slippers. He was unprepossessing, weasel-faced, with cautious little eyes hiding behind flabby eyelids. A real informer's head. But Jean-François had neither time nor choice. He explained that he wanted his moustache shaved off and his hair, which was naturally ash-blond, dyed black.

"A joke I'm going to play," he explained, "a bet I made with my girl-friend."

The barber made no reply and silently went to work. From time to time Jean-François tried to catch the barber's eye in the mirror, but never managed to. For a whole hour they did not exchange a word.

"It's all up," Jean-François was thinking.

"How's that?" the barber asked at last.

"Fine," said Jean-François. He was in fact quite unrecognisable. His hard, dark face was even painful for him to contemplate. He gave the barber twenty francs.

"I'll bring you the change," said the barber.

"Never mind," said Jean-François.

"I'll bring you the change," the barber repeated. He disappeared behind a dirty curtain. Jean-François was so certain that he was about to be denounced that he hesitated between two alternatives—whether simply to escape or to put this man out of the way before he fled. He had no time to decide. The barber came back almost at once with an old raincoat over his arm.

"Put this on quick," he said in a low voice, still without looking at Jean-François. "The coat is no beauty, but it's the only one I have. You'd soon be noticed in those torn clothes."

\*

Jean-François told me this story as gaily as ever, but his gaiety did not seem to me to have its usual freshness. His laugh has become a little hard. It's perhaps his dyed hair which is now black as ink that alters his whole expression. Or perhaps he too is beginning to bear the stamp of the man in perpetual danger and to feel the invisible presence always on the look-out behind his shoulders.

In any case he will do no more liaison work for the chief. I don't want the least clue to lead the police to Saint Luc. I told

Jean-François this and he accepted it without a word. He very rarely speaks of his brother, and when he does it is very briefly. The fact that his brother and the chief are the same person seems to baffle him. I regret this reserve on his part—I used to like to hear him say “Saint Luc.”

\*

The three comrades with whose escape Louis H. has entrusted us took the train yesterday at 7.45. They were in a third-class compartment with handcuffs and guarded by five gendarmes. Mathilde got on the train at the same time. She wore a black coat and a scarf of the same colour on her head. She found herself in the prisoners' coach. The train passed through several stations, then it sped on through a deserted countryside. At 11.10 Mathilde pulled the emergency signal, then slipped into the compartment adjoining the one where the prisoners were, went to the window and unfastened her black scarf. A few moments later, as the train was coming to a stop, the Bison and two of our men emerged from behind the railway embankment and through the outside door entered the compartment where the gendarmes and Louis H.'s comrades were. Our men had sub-machine-guns. The gendarmes took off the prisoners' handcuffs and then we made them take off their own clothes, which they did not seem to mind too much. Louis H.'s comrades and our men took the gendarmes' uniforms and their carbines and jumped out on the line. The head conductor appeared on the scene at this moment.

“You can go on now,” the Bison cried to him. The train got into motion again. Mathilde did not even get out.

\*

The place selected for the abduction is about twelve kilometres from a fairly large estate. This property belongs to the big wine-grower who offered me the tank. He had been hiding on the other side of the embankment with a cart and two horses. In the cart there were some big empty wine barrels. Louis H.'s men and ours hid in the bottom of the barrels. The wine-grower took them home to his still-room. The Bison and his two comrades left at nightfall. The escaped prisoners are going to stay hidden away at the wine-grower's for a week. And also put a little fat on.

In the course of a trip down their way I spent an evening with them. The three men have no flesh left on their bones. The discipline in their camp was much more severe than in the one where I knew Legrain. No parcels allowed, a lot of useless hard labour, a constant surveillance, sentries at night in every hut. High-tension current in the barbed wire. The prisoners were so hungry that they ate the grass which grew in the camp. The commander made his inspection every morning with a riding-crop. That set the tone for the guards.

"However, one day the brutalities suddenly ceased," one of the escaped men told me, "thanks to the intervention of the most ridiculous of our comrades. This country squire in normal times spent his life writing adventure stories which were published by the local papers. He carried on his resistance in the style of his novels. The miracle is that he has not been shot. We have never seen a man more impulsive, loose-tongued, fantastical. But one day he told the commander that he had a wireless transmission set hidden in the very camp, that he was in communication with London and that he would have the commander executed if a single prisoner was struck once more. The old brute was frightened."

\*

There was in the same camp a section for communists. They were, as always, treated in a particularly appalling way. Somehow a few of them managed to escape. Three days later they came back and gave themselves up again. They had escaped *without the party's authorisation*. The party was sending them back to the camp.

\*

This fact reminds me of a conversation I had with a communist Deputy who had escaped from the camp of Chateaubriant. He could easily escape. He did not do so before his party ordered him to. Only three of his comrades were designated to make this escape. The rest remained. They were included in the first official massacre of hostages.

In prison and in the concentration camp this Deputy's most cruel torment was to think that he had been taken prisoner in his

home, for the communist party had instructed its important militants never to sleep at home.

"You understand," said this man who had given to the party twenty-five years of his life, "you understand, I might have been expelled, and I would have deserved it. Luckily the executive committee was lenient. They simply gave me a good dressing down and put me to work."

This work consisted in editing the clandestine *Humanité*. At that time four of its chief editors in succession had already been shot.

\*

I don't know a man in the resistance who does not speak of the communists with a special quality in his voice and expression, a deeper gravity.

\*

An officer from the French headquarters in London had just come to spend a few weeks in Paris on an important mission. The day after the bombing of the Renault factories by the Americans we heard a worker from that very factory in the *métro*, whose arm was in a sling, openly rejoicing at the results of the raid. My companion slipped something into the worker's uninjured hand. It was the Cross of Lorraine.

"I realise it's a ridiculous gesture," he said to me afterwards, "but I haven't been in France for three years and the discovery of this new nation has turned my head a little."

A fairly long journey in the company of Major the Marquis de B.

He had been sentenced to hard labour for life for his patriotism and had escaped after thirty months of horrible imprisonment. He is a man of exceptional temperament, extremely daring and ever lucid. While waiting for us to find him passage to England, he travels up and down the country to gather information just as if he had a settled status and as if all the police of France were not looking for him.

"I feel I have been living as a blind man," he told me. "In my circle we had neither the opportunity nor the time nor the wish, I must admit, to get close to and know the people. Since my

escape I have seen only them, and I shall not forget the lesson."

One evening, through a hitch in making connections, Major de B. found himself without papers and without money in a village where he knew no one. Major de B. knocked at the schoolmaster's door and asked for hospitality. Without asking any questions the schoolmaster led this stranger into the dining-room where the dinner—which was pitiful, naturally—was being served. A woman was there with two children. After the meal Major de B. took the schoolmaster aside and said to him,

"You have a family. I must warn you that I am an officer of General de Gaulle's escaped from prison, and that the Gestapo has put a price on my head".

The schoolmaster pulled up a board in the floor and showed the major two heavy revolvers.

\*

In changing trains we found ourselves seats in a compartment where there was a very drunk German soldier. Presently he started vomiting on our feet. Major de B.'s face became very pale and he said in a low voice, "*Heraus, Schwein!*" Did the soldier think he was in the presence of a German officer in mufti or an agent of the Gestapo, or did he simply obey automatically the voice of a superior? I don't know, but he left the compartment.

\*

Many people in the resistance spend most of their time on the train. Nothing can be trusted to the telephone, telegrams or letters. All mail has to be carried. Every confidence, every contact requires a journey. Then there are the distributions of arms, newspapers, radios and sabotage equipment. Which explains the necessity for an army of liaison agents who circulate through France like horses on a merry-go-round. Which also explains the terrible blows which befall them. The enemy knows as well as we do how necessary it is for us to keep constantly travelling. I have never taken a trip of any length without coming across two, three or four comrades of my organisation or of another, and I have guessed many more whom I did not know. Being a conspirator develops

an almost infallible instinct in this regard. I wonder if this instinct is as strong in the police.

\*

I think I am being followed by an old gent with a trimmed beard and the Legion of Honour ribbon in his buttonhole. Is it the Gestapo putting out its feelers? I've got one of our people following the old fellow.

\*

The Bison had a stupid accident. He was going along very fast on a motorcycle stolen from the Germans and skidded. Coma. Hospital. He had on him two revolvers and his big clasp knife.

His arms were deposited at the Record Office. The French and German police were notified. They carried the still unconscious Bison to an operating table. A cracked skull, a broken jaw. He was treated. The police arrived and seeing him still unconscious put off the questioning and the search of his person till the next day. The Bison came to at dawn. His head was completely wrapped in bandages. He was suffering terribly. There was nobody about. He got up and left the hospital through a window. He went reeling through the town and came to a tram which was on its way to a suburb where he has friends. The Bison climbed into the tram. "I saw four doors," he said later, "Luckily I found the right one."

\*

There are two people following me now. The old gent with the ribbon in his buttonhole and the other who pretends to be selling tickets for the National Lottery. It is time for me to disappear. Evidently I have been travelling too much.

\*

It is very disagreeable. The woman at whose house I am hiding is afraid. A priest who is working with us asked her to shelter me. She has done it from a sense of duty and because the priest has been her spiritual guide for years. But I feel that she is in a constant state of anguish. If the bell rings or there is a knock at the door her breathing stops, and yet it is impossible for me to remain without liaisons.

I have been trying to think up possible disguises. But my eyes are too close together, my nose too unmistakable. A beard on my face is unnatural, and besides the police are suspicious of all beards nowadays. I am not cut out to be an actor. We had a comrade who could easily make himself hunch-backed and he would look so pathetic that the Germans often gave their place up to him in the *métro*. He would sit down with great caution, for he carried many things in his hump.

\*

An urgent mission obliges me to take a trip. What a relief to the woman who has been putting me up!

\*

The very day that I left Madame S.'s flat the police arrived. The search came to nothing, but they took Madame S. away all the same.

\*

I went away to complete a series of plans which I have been preparing for a long time and which London is interested in. Ordinarily I go to a farmer who lives near my objective and who gives me all the information. So that I shall not be noticed in this very closely watched neighbourhood a doctor from the nearest town drives me in his car to a clearing, from which point I reach the farm under the cover of the bushes. This time the doctor was short of petrol and was only able to take me to a lane and then left at once. At the entry to the lane—it was a beautiful evening—a German soldier was strolling. He did not see me get out but he saw the car come and leave.

I had dinner with my farmer and showed him my plans. I had just slipped them back into my pocket when the soldier I had seen in the lane came in and made a sign for me to follow him. The path was deserted. I thought for a moment of jumping on his back, gouging his eyes out and killing him. But I was afraid of getting the farmer shot. This was also why I did not dare get rid of my plans. We arrived at a military post where the soldier took me up before the officer in command and explained my case. This lieutenant was dark and I remember very well that this face gave me hope. I prefer dark Germans to fair ones.

"What were you doing at the farm?" the lieutenant asked me. I had had time to get my answer ready. I said that I was an agent for an agricultural insurance company.

"What insurance company?"

"The Zurich," I said. I didn't say it by chance. I don't know what impulse warned me that if any name was capable of interesting the officer and thereby disarming his suspicion this was the one. As it happened, he knew the town of Zurich and so did I. We spoke of its gardens, its theatres and museums and of Switzerland, and he let me go without searching me.

\*

The plans I had taken had to be handed over by me to a large business office in Paris in the Avenue de l'Opéra. Two days later, having travelled only by small local lines, I presented myself there. As I was about to ring the bell the door opened of its own accord. A hand fell softly on my wrist and drew me inside. I found myself facing German policemen. Since morning the office had become a trap.

"Who are you? What have you come here for?" I made up a reason which fits in with the normal operations of the business. "Your papers?" I showed my latest ones which were fabricated subsequently to my being shadowed by the two old men. One of the policemen went to the telephone and spoke with the Gestapo headquarters. I understand German and I followed the conversation. At the other end of the wire they asked the policeman to read a list of names. I heard the one which I went under only ten days ago. The policeman came back to me, gave me back my papers, pushed me to the door. I tried to go down as slowly as I could. In the concierge's lodge I thought I saw a man in spectacles. I went out, started walking and stopped before a shop window. A few paces from me was a man with glasses. Then I went as far as to a bakery that I know which has a double exit. In this way I gained a few minutes. I saw a fire station where I found some well-disposed people. They hid me in a fire wagon and took me in their car to a second-hand furniture dealer on the left bank, one of our best agents. I handed him my plans and the next day I left Paris pushing a hand-cart full of old chairs.



Three times in succession I have escaped the worst. What an extraordinary combination of improbabilities! A believer would have called this series a succession of miracles. A baccarat player would have said it was a good hand.

\*

I have gone into hiding in a tiny village at the house of a clandestine slaughterer. Every day somehow brings him a pig, a calf or a sheep which he bleeds, kills and cuts up. He is protected by the whole population whom he feeds on cheap meat. This man is a saint of the black market. He wants no more than just to earn his living. His pleasure is to trick the Germans and Vichy. He feeds and shelters me for an absurd sum. He gives me the best titbits. I am saturated with meat, for a wonder. The clandestine slaughterer is also hiding an ex-minister who is soon leaving for London. We play bowls together. The weather is lovely, the mountain air is bracing and time passes quickly.

\*

When one goes, as we do, from one precarious hiding place to another, at the mercy of accomplices, good will or pursuit, one is bound to visit some extraordinary places. The faculty for astonishment diminishes. But this time mine is revived by my new hide-out.

It is a small eighteenth-century manor-house, with the woodwork, tapestry, paintings and furniture of the period. All around it are silent plantations of trees and in front of the façade a pond with water lilies in bloom. Moss has invaded the paths and everything seems asleep within the crumbling walls which surround the park.

The manor belongs to two old ladies, two sisters who never married and who have lived here for three-quarters of a century. They had a brother whom they adored. He was killed in 1914. Their friends had died off little by little and now they know no one. The property lies far from the roads and they have never seen a German. Their food, which consisted of vegetables and dairy products, has not changed, and is supplied by an old farmer.

The world and life have forgotten these women.

My clandestine slaughterer would see the farmer from time to time. He spoke to him about me. The farmer spoke of me to his mistresses, and here I am.

In the day-time I go for walks among the enchanted trees where the animals have no fear of man. In the evening I listen to the song of the frogs and later to the cry of the horned owls. At meal-times the old ladies in exquisite French ask me questions about the war. But they cannot follow my answers for they have no idea what a plane is, or a tank, a radio or even a telephone. They were already sunk in a kind of lethargy when the last war began. Their brother's death definitely stopped for them the movement of the universe. The only war which is real and living to them is the war of 1870. Their father, their uncles and their older cousins took part in it. The stories they had collected of it gave an aura of excitement to the youth of these two women. Their hatred of the Prussians goes back to a time when I was not yet born.

Once I tried to give the old ladies a picture of the resistance in a few strokes. They nodded their little wrinkled heads. "I see, sister," said one to the other, "They are like the franc-tireurs." "But decent and well-mannered, sister," the other hastened to add.

\*

Time passes. Time weighs heavy. I think a lot about the chief. He could live indefinitely in a place like this. I wish I had his book—the only one he has written. Few people know it. But a few learned men scattered about the world hold J. for their equal because of this book. It is because of this book that I wanted to know him. For a long time he has been my intellectual guide.

\*

Time passes.

I have amused myself by drawing up from memory<sup>3</sup> the list of the clandestine papers I know:

*l'Avante-Garde*

*l'Art Français*

*Bir Hakim*

*Combat*

*l'Ecole Laïque*

*l'Enchaîné du Nord*

*l'Étudiant Patriote*

*France d'abord*

*Franc-Tireur*  
*le Franc-Tireur Normand*  
*le Franc-Tireur Parisien*  
*l'Humanité*  
*l'Insurgé*  
*Les Lettres Françaises*  
*Libération*  
*Libérer et Fédérer*  
*Le Médecin Français*  
*Musiciens d'Aujourd'hui*  
*Pantagruel*  
*Le Père Duchesne*

*Ce Piston*  
*Le Populaire*  
*Résistance*  
*Rouge Midi*  
*Russie d'Aujourd'hui*  
*l'Université Libre*  
*Valmy*  
*la Vie Ouvrière*  
*la Voix du Nord*  
*la Voix de Paris*  
*la Voix Populaire*

\*

There was also "*la Voix des Stalags*."

In early 1942 several Parisian war prisoners met in Paris, some freed because of the precarious state of their health, most of them escaped. They spoke of life in the camps and all agreed that it would be well to distribute among the prisoners a paper that would combat the propaganda circulated among them in favour of Marshal Pétain, which the Germans encourage in every way.

The comrades who had met decided to edit "*la Voix des Stalags*." They found the paper and the printer. They drew up the articles and the news stories. But in what form could the newspaper be got through? Merchants were giving enough supplies to make up hundreds of parcels which would hide the slender sheets. But how prevent these parcels from being searched, and how obtain the necessary addresses?

A member of the committee solved both these problems at once. He went to the office of the paper, "*Je Suis Partout*" and told an employee the following story:

He was the principal of a school. He had set up a system of regular collections among his pupils to send presents to the prisoners. He had been a prisoner himself, and in Germany had read enthusiastically the virulent collaborationist campaign carried on by "*Je Suis Partout*." And he would like to publicise this paper among the prisoners.

The would-be school principal was eagerly led into the office of the editor-in-chief. He was given 1200 addresses in the different

Stalags, printed on labels of the journal that is working for the enemy. There was no better safe-conduct for the "*Voix des Stalags*."

\*

I have a new name and once more I have shaved off my moustache. My hair is very long and I wear an old cape. I am a book-keeper with an industrialist who employs about a hundred workers. I sleep at the factory. The most regular identity card is not good enough any more for the police. During my retreat the control machine, the machine to choke us, has been terribly tightened up. On account of the deportations and the deserters they demand a worker's card, a censor's certificate and a certificate of domicile. The roundups and the dragnets go on relentlessly. Trams, restaurants, cafés and cinemas are searched. Whole quarters are purged, apartment by apartment. It is difficult to travel a hundred kilometres in a train without being questioned by the police.

The whole business is becoming infernally difficult. Women are going to have more and more work to do.

\*

Took a studio for our contacts.

In this house I pass for a painter who likes to paint when he pleases or entertain his friends.

\*

This morning I had a rendezvous at the studio with Jean-François, Lemasque and Felix. It was months since I had seen them, and we had a lot of things to decide for their maquis. As I was coming up to the house the concierge was on the doorstep desultorily beating an old rug. Seeing me cross the street she suddenly began to beat it with a kind of frenzy. This concierge has never been one of us and knows nothing of my activities. All the same, I did not go in.

\*

This woman has deliberately saved my life. An extremely simple chain of circumstances has led to a catastrophe.

On leaving his region Jean-François delegated his command to

an ex-officer who has plenty of authority but too much optimism and no conspiratorial sense. It became necessary for him to send a message to Jean-François and he sent him a liaison agent. He chose a very young chap without any experience and, instead of sending him to a relay, he gave him the street address and the number of the studio. The lad, while waiting between trains, fell asleep. He was awakened by a comb-out. They found my address on him and he was not able to invent a plausible explanation. A trap was laid and Lemasque, Felix and Jean-François were caught. It was only after this that the concierge thought of using the rug as an alarm-signal.

\*

#### News of Jean-François.

The police officer questioned him in the studio, having before him all the reports found on Jean-François, Lemasque and Felix. Jean-François answered whatever came into his head. Suddenly he bit the commissaire in the hand so violently that he took a piece of his palm off. He seized the documents, knocked over the two inspectors one on top of the other and went down the stairs like a hurricane. He got the reports safely to me and has gone back to the maquis with my instructions.

\*

#### News of Felix.

On a scrap of onion-skin paper Felix had the address of an emergency apartment rented in the name of a young girl, where I would go from time to time in the guise of protector. This address Felix had written in a code of his own. When questioned, he managed to interpret the signs as a rendezvous taken on a certain day and a certain hour in a public square with an important leader of the resistance. He let this come out with the hesitations, the evasions and the reticences which were needed for him to be believed. In the same way he agreed to lead two policemen to this supposed rendezvous.

He arrived in the middle of the square, leading the policemen by a few steps. A tram was just then passing. Felix jumped in, slipped through and out the other side, where he disappeared in the crowd.

Then he wanted to let me know and went to the emergency address. But in the meantime the girl who had rented it had come to the studio, where the police had been able to make her talk. Felix was recaptured.

He is locked up like Lemasque in Vichy in the cellars of the Hotel Bellevue which has been requisitioned by the Gestapo.

\*

I saw in the factory a young worker who spent eight months without cause in the German quarter of the prison of Fresnes. He has two ribs broken and he limps for life.

What is most unbearable according to him is the heavy smell of pus which has spurted out over the walls of the cells.

"The smell of our tortured comrades," he says.

I think of Lemasque. I think of my old friend Felix.

\*

News of Lemasque.

He was shut up in the same cellar as Felix, with handcuffs and irons on his feet. Felix was considered the more dangerous. He had aroused the savage fury of the Gestapo by outwitting them. They questioned him the very first day. He did not return from the questioning, but that night, by the light of the bulbs in the ceiling, Lemasque saw Felix's corpse being dragged through the corridor by a rope tied round the neck.

There were no longer eyes in his face, no lower jaw. Lemasque was able to recognise him chiefly by the top of his bald head. Felix la Tonsure. . . .

Lemasque was so afraid of undergoing the same tortures that suddenly he *knew* that he would escape.

He succeeded (he will never be able to say how) in undoing the padlock that fastened the irons to his ankles. With his handcuffed hands he loosened the insecurely anchored bars of the cellar vent and, feet first, he wriggled out. There he was in the streets of Vichy with his hands still shackled. The only person he knew in Vichy was a ministry clerk who lived in a commandeered hotel. Lemasque had been to see him just once to obtain false papers. In the streets over-run by patrols of *gardes mobiles* and

the Gestapo on their beats Lemasque, with his handcuffs, started off to look for the hotel. He would have to find it before dawn or he was lost. Hours went by. Lemasque kept wandering round Vichy. At last he thought he had found the spot. He entered the sleeping hotel. One last effort, a desperate effort of memory to recall the floor and the exact position of the room. At last Lemasque thought he remembered it. He knocked at the door, which opened. It was in fact the comrade he had been looking for.

That evening a friendly workman came with a hack saw and freed Lemasque from his handcuffs. I have had the story confirmed by the ministry clerk and by the worker. Otherwise I should always have wondered if Lemasque had not weakened and thought up this escape in the interest of the Gestapo.

\*

The resistance movement commits sabotage, attacks and kills, abundantly, obstinately and spontaneously. All the organisations have their combat groups. The guerillas form a veritable army. The mass of German corpses has become so dense that the enemy has had to give up the hostage system. They can no longer line up one hundred dead Frenchmen for one dead German, unless they are prepared to assassinate the whole of France. The enemy has thus recognised publicly, as it were, that the country was triumphing over terror.

But the Gestapo goes on with its terrible work. It aims to replace hostages by suspects.

\*

I am taking charge of a reception. In my post I am not supposed to attend to detail operations, but we have had very high losses. There is no one left in the sector who is able to lead a mission of this kind. Mathilde is coming with me; she will learn the job. The squad is composed of a taxi-owner, his wife and a village blacksmith. They have been lent to us by Louis H.'s group. I don't know them.

\*

We have spent a night on the terrain without results. For an hour a plane circled above us in the dark, but there was a heavy

mist. The pilot probably could not see the flash of our signal light. At dawn we retired to a wooden cabin. It belongs to the blacksmith who is also a poacher and who built it in a wood on the edge of our terrain. The taxi is parked under the trees, with a camouflaged transmitting set. We exchanged messages with London. The plane will return to-morrow night.

\*

It rained till evening. We had nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and very little to smoke. I got my group to while away the time in talk.

The taxi-owner is a former aviation mechanic. As soon as he was able to form contact with people in the resistance he put his gasogene car and his person at its disposal. He has done a great deal of work. He has not yet had any accident. His only adventure is rather special.

Last year, in the chief motion picture house of the small town where he lives, three Germans were killed by a grenade. The Kommandatur gave notice that hostages would be shot. The French police commissioner who belonged to no organisation and who was simply a decent fellow called upon the German Kommandant and protested that the incident in the theatre was not an act perpetrated by the resistance but an expression of anger on the part of soldiers returning from the Russian front against others who had never been there. The German officer listened to the commissaire attentively and made a bargain with him.

"I'll give you three days to prove your claim. If you don't succeed you will be shot together with some inhabitant of the town who is willing to vouch for you."

The commissaire accepted. He talked it over with the taxi-owner with whom he was friendly, though without knowing that the other belonged to a secret organisation. The taxi-owner accepted. Two days passed. On the third, the commissaire was able to collect irrefutable proof of what he had claimed.

"It may well be because of this affair that I haven't yet had any mix-up with the Gestapo," the taxi-driver told me. "That gave me a first-class alibi. You see the point. The Fritzes must have thought no underground member would ever take such a



risk. But at the time I didn't think about it and for forty-eight hours I had a belly-ache, I can tell you."

The taxi-driver's wife is about thirty. She is youthful-looking, obliging and motherly. She hates the Germans with a kind of inhuman innocence. She rejoices when bombs kill children in the Rhineland. "There's only one good kind of German," she says gently, "and that's a dead German."

One evening in the course of a reconnaissance mission in the vicinity of a German camp the taxi-driver's wife cut her knee against a barbed wire. She put a handkerchief around the wound which was bleeding profusely and reached the nearest station. In the train she sat next to a German soldier. The soldier saw the blood-soaked handkerchief. He was a sensitive soul. He insisted on replacing the handkerchief with his field bandage. "While he was bandaging my leg I looked at the back of his neck," said the taxi-driver's wife. "What a good place wasted for a knife-thrust. But I had to do something to him. So I stole his flashlight. There it is. We use it for the signals."

\*

The poaching blacksmith goes by the name of Joseph Pioche—which may or may not be his real name. His face is terra-cotta colour. Small, laughing eyes. He has the lips of a man who likes good food and girls. Beneath his air of simplicity he is one of the sharpest and most resolute of men. He doesn't like to tell his adventures. But they are famous among the comrades. The taxi-driver forced him to tell some of them.

Joseph Pioche, who is a remarkable radio operator, had set up his station in a small house they had rented out in the fields. After a time the region became very unsafe. Detection cars were cruising in the vicinity. It became imperative to change localities, but on the last day Pioche had to send twenty-two extremely important telegrams. Twenty-two telegrams take a long time when you're surrounded by detectors. Pioche barricaded himself in the house with his two well-armed sons. Their orders were to hold out till all the messages were sent, but Pioche was able to get the twenty-two telegrams through without accident.

He had one shortly afterwards in Paris. He was coming out of

the Gare de Lyon to deliver some false seals and false stamps to a comrade when he was arrested by some of Doriot's men who were working for the Germans. They made him climb into a car and took him to Fresnes. Pioche lit his pipe. "That's certainly the last one you will smoke," said one of the gangsters who accompanied him. Pioche smokes a great deal and fast. And each time he put his hand in his tobacco pouch he pulled out a stamp or a seal and slipped it between the cushions in the car. Then he said, "If I must die soon I might as well eat the chicken I have in my musette bag." He bit into a leg, he bit into a wing, and while so doing his agile fingers delved into the carcase which was stuffed with seals and stamps, and threw them with the bones through the window. When he reached Fresnes he no longer had anything dangerous on him. In spite of this, and to make him confess, they led him three times before the execution wall. He wept out of sheer innocence. In the end they released him. What amuses Joseph Pioche most in this whole business is the fact that in Fresnes he met a landed proprietor who had had him thrown into prison for having poached on his property. They had become good friends. The other was shot.

\*

These stories carried us without too much boredom till dark. We went to the terrain. This time the signals were seen by the plane. It landed just in the right spot. The British airmen who carry out these missions are first-class. But the plane was too heavy for the soaked ground.

It got stuck in the mud so deep that the united efforts of the crew, the passengers it had brought and ourselves could not get it free. Then the English pilot said, with magnificent confidence, "We must get help from the neighbouring village."

"Come with me and we'll see the mayor," Joseph Pioche said to him, "because if I went alone he might not believe me."

They went and awoke the mayor and they came back with all the men of the village.

They got the plane free.

\*

Lemasque, after his escape, took only a week of rest and got back to work. He has just been arrested again. By luck he is still,

for the moment, in the hands of the French police. Mathilde has promised me that she will get him out of prison. However, as Lemasque knew where I live, I am changing my domicile.

3  
\*

A small house belonging to a retired official, on the edge of a village. It is being rented by X, an old friend who is also hiding under a false identity.

His wife has been deported to Germany. Their son, a boy of ten, is with him. In the evening, at dinner, I naturally call X by his real name and he, naturally, answers to it. The little boy nudges X with his elbow and whispers, "Duval, Papa, our name is Duval."

\*

Mathilde, with her hair dyed henna, heavy make-up and a cushion under her dress, has passed herself off as Lemasque's pregnant mistress. She has been given permission to see him. Lemasque's escape promised to be rather easy, thanks to inside accomplices, provided a rather dubious character who is Lemasque's cellmate can be got rid of. To this end Mathilde had slipped a small vial into Lemasque's pocket. Lemasque refused to poison the man, who is in all likelihood a spy.

\*

Mathilde has passed Lemasque some chloroform. He refused to use it because he is afraid of giving an excessive dose. Yet time is pressing. The Gestapo is going to demand that Lemasque be handed over. I think he still remembers Paul Dounat.

\*

This morning, which was a Sunday morning, I had a great fright. A German military car stopped opposite our house and a Kommandant got out. I was standing at the window. (I spend a good part of the day at this post, being unable to go out). And although I was hidden by a curtain I was taken aback for a moment.

X's son, who was playing in the room, glanced into the street. "It's nothing," he said to me. "The Kommandant of the region comes to the corner bistro every Sunday. He thinks they have the best brandy in the region. If you just look a little you'll have a good laugh. We'll spy together." The child had a secretive air. At the end of an hour I saw the Kommandant go out into the yard of the café and roll in a pile of manure. "That isn't the Boche," the boy told me then triumphantly. "This is what happens. The Kommandant drinks a bottle of brandy. When he is good and drunk he insists on changing clothes with the bistro-keeper. And the disgusted bistro-keeper goes and dirties the Boche uniform in the manure." The child was laughing inaudibly, and at first I did likewise. But then I began to wonder if at heart the Kommandant did not hate his uniform and if, liberated by the influence of alcohol, he was not simply resorting to a proxy to have it covered with filth.

\*

The sensibility of the Germans sometimes manifests itself in the oddest roundabout ways.

A young nurse whom I knew was assigned to care for a captain of the S.S. He paid assiduous court to her, which made the girl furious. "I like to see you angry," said the S.S. man, "it makes you even prettier."

"That's not hard," the nurse answered, "all I have to do is look at a Boche." And the captain was enchanted. But often he would say,

"I should like to be a preacher whose power with words was irresistible and have all the French at my feet. And you would embrace my knees."

I don't know quite what to make of this. The fanaticism of sheer brutality? Thirst to dominate and be loved at the same time? Masochism? Spiritual sadism?

\*

Lemasque has been transferred to another prison. There he found one of our comrades who is in very bad shape from the questioning he has undergone. Mathilde had organised a rescue by

main force for the day when Lemasque was led for the last time from the prison to the examining magistrate. Everything was ready. Our men were about to open fire. But Lemasque who was holding his comrade's arm gave Mathilde a negative shake of the head and continued to hold up the other who was dragging himself along with difficulty. On leaving the Palace of Justice both were handed over to the Gestapo. I felt an impulse of anger against Lemasque. But undoubtedly he has found his own Legrain.

\*

Felix's wife begs to be allowed to work for us. She had been in complete ignorance of Felix's underground activity. She learned of his end through one of our emissaries who was to give her a sum by way of financial relief, but who had explicit instructions to divulge no detail regarding the organisation, no relay, no point of reference. Felix's wife refused the money and began to weep softly. "My poor man," she kept repeating. "If I had only known, if I had only known." She could not forgive herself for having so often reproached Felix for his absences, his apparent indolence.

I have no idea how she managed to ferret out one of our people. Through a series of intermediaries her request finally reached Mathilde, who alone knows my refuge and who has transmitted it to me. Felix's wife will be a liaison agent. It is the most dangerous work, but the wives of executed comrades have always accomplished these missions better than anyone.

We are assuming the responsibility for Felix's consumptive little boy.

This question of children is a weighty one. There are hundreds of them, probably thousands, who are now without a father or a mother. Shot, imprisoned, deported. I know cases in which the children have accompanied their arrested parents right to the prison gates and who have been chased away by the guards. I know other cases in which the children have remained alone, abandoned in the apartment from which the parents had been dragged. And other cases in which the first thought of these children was to hover about the house to warn friends of the trap.

I knew a woman whose job it was to get British soldiers and airmen across the Spanish frontier. She would take them one by

one, camouflage them as sick patients, play the role of wife, present their papers, avoid incidents. To complete the family comedy her son of seven always accompanied her. She made the trip fifty-four times. Then the trick was discovered. She was shot. We never knew what became of the child.

\*

Lemasque was taken to room 87. He fainted after a half hour of questioning. He regained consciousness. He swallowed a cyanide pill.

\*

The most recent invention of the Gestapo questioners: They apply a dentist's drill to the gum till the point attacks the jaw-bone.

\*

I have sent Mathilde and Jean-François to inspect our transmitting stations—or rather, what is left of them—one by one.

We have had a string of bad luck.

At the beginning of the resistance movement we could send out our dots and dashes without too great risk. The Germans were not in sufficient force to give full attention to the secret broadcasts and had little equipment. But at that time we lacked transmitting sets, experienced operators, continuous liaisons with England. The work was done in a rather disorganised and primitive way. To-day we are infinitely better equipped and trained. Only, as in every war, the enemy was quick to join the parade. He has a first-class technical personnel and his detection cars, disguised either as delivery, mail or Red Cross trucks, patrol, cruise, swarm and spy all over the country.

I happened to observe one of these cars coming close to its objective. It was travelling very slowly, at the pace of a man's walk. Before each house it would stop for a second and start off again smoothly and noiselessly. One felt that within an inexorable mechanism was reducing yard by yard the radius of approach. One had the impression that a choking monster was feeling out

the dwellings one after the other and passing its tentacles through the walls.

It does not take much more than half an hour for a car, after it has caught the first waves, to reach the spot where the station operates. And half an hour is very short for getting contact with London and to transmit the messages. Then begins a struggle. While the operator works at his post a comrade stands lookout at the window, another comrade keeps watch in the street. As soon as he catches sight of the beast that is on the scent and feeling its way he makes a signal previously agreed upon to the man at the window. He in turn warns the operator. It is a game of speed and of luck. In the last week it has gone against us.

Ajax was taken completely by surprise. His watchers were keeping their lookout on the front of the house. The Gestapo came up an alley in the rear. This time the detection was concealed in a fire-waggon and it was by using firemen's ladders that the German police got in through the window. Ajax avenged himself as he could. He asked his assistant, "What's happened to that time bomb?" The Gestapo agents were good and scared. Ajax took advantage of this to destroy his transmission code.

On Diamant's arrest we have no details. We only know that in the midst of a message to London he suddenly tapped out the words, "Police . . . police . . . police" And the broadcast was cut off.

Achille was the one I liked best. Before the war he was a waiter in a popular restaurant where I sometimes went. A little man, rather old, dark and gentle. He had learned to operate a radio very well. He was very conscientious and skilful. He always managed to get his messages through. Even when the detection car was spotted he would continue tapping. He knew how to stop just in time. He had an inner sense of seconds. Perhaps because he had been a waiter in a café. He must have miscalculated once. He was shot the day after he was caught.

\*

Received a report on a family of average means. The elder son—landowner, fond of good living, who had been a radical municipal councillor—is the moving spirit of a whole network of

information sources. He has killed several Germans in clashes. He is being sought and there is a price on his head. His wife is in hiding in the woods of the region. His two brothers are leaders of groups in the maquis. The father, who for important business reasons is in contact with the Germans in Paris, uses his connections to smuggle arms, mail, transmitting sets to the underground and to obtain precious confidential information. The mother who knows all about this activity approves.

\*

When a man of the resistance movement is caught on simple suspicion he nevertheless has a chance to survive. But if this man is a Jew he is sure to die the most horrible death. In spite of this there are many Jews in our organisations.

\*

Mathilde has wound up her tour of inspection at Augustine's farm, from which I left, last year, for Gibraltar. The operator, who is very young, has committed a gross blunder. His fiancée was spending a few hours at the departmental seat. He took the train to see her. He did not return. He was surely picked up in a raid and because of his age sent to Germany.

At the farm Mathilde and Jean-François found messages to be transmitted that had been brought by liaison agents. There was a bundle of them and some were extremely urgent. They studied the transmitting code and Jean-François, who is a good operator, began to tap out the messages.

The station was set up in one of the commons from which a long ribbon of road could be seen. Mathilde and Augustine stood by the window. A truck appeared. It was not going fast. It stopped for a moment in front of a deserted sheep-pen. "Keep right on," Mathilde said to Jean-François, "but we've got to watch out." The truck started moving again, stopped in front of an empty barn. "Keep right on," said Mathilde. The truck slowly grew larger. Jean-François was tapping very fast. The truck was skirting the fields of the farm. "Another second and I'll be through with a telegram," said Jean-François. "Go ahead," said Mathilde. The



truck was coming. "Take the set and beat it into the woods," said Mathilde. Jean-François hesitated, he didn't want to leave two women alone. The men of the Gestapo were getting out of the truck. "It's an order," said Mathilde. When the German police entered the farm they found two silent women, dressed in black quietly knitting. After a purely routine search they made their excuses and left.

\*

Augustine's daughter, who is seventeen, has joined us. She had been wanting to for a long time. She took advantage of Mathilde's visit and of her authority to force her mother's consent. Madeleine will be paired as a liaison agent with Felix's widow, who is doing very good work.

\*

When we ask people who, without belonging to an organisation, help us to conceal arms, to take in comrades, when we ask them what would give them pleasure, they often answer, "Have the B.B.C. say something for us." This seems to them a wonderful reward.

\*

We had a very reliable relay in V., an old petrol station, closed since the armistice and kept by a little old man with tearful eyes, of exemplary faithfulness and discretion. We had had to abuse his services. Absolute prudence is impossible. There are so many losses that we are forced to overload those who remain at liberty.

Two Gestapo agents appeared one day before the little old man. He received them very gently, and when they permitted him to put down his arms he took a revolver from under a pile of rags and killed them. Then he went out and called to the driver of the German car for help. As the other came running he put a bullet through his neck and fled in the Gestapo car.

\*

Madeleine and Felix's widow have been arrested. Denounced by a militiaman. Mathilde has decided he must die.

One of our information agents ran into a patrol of four German soldiers in an absolutely forbidden zone. He fired fast and well. He killed them all and then committed suicide. He could have escaped. The way was free. We found this out through two Germans who survived and who were handed over to us. But he was too much afraid of being caught, tortured and made to talk. He had intended the last bullet for himself a long time before. He obeyed a reflex.

\*

The fear of not being able to endure the torments of the questionings and of revealing the names and meeting-places of their comrades is an almost psychopathic obsession among many. Our people are less afraid of suffering and tortures than of their own potential of weakness. No one knows what he is capable of enduring. And one trembles at the thought of having to live—even a short time—with the feeling of having sent comrades to their death, ruined a network, destroyed a labour to which one had been more deeply attached than to life itself. For some being caught even becomes an obsession. They cannot go to sleep, they cannot wake up without its being uppermost in their mind. A hundred times a day their hand strays to their provision of poison. And they commit suicide before they have exhausted all their chances to escape. For these chances are at the same time chances to talk.

\*

Mathilde and the Bison have executed the militiaman who had denounced Felix's widow and young Madeleine.

\*

My photograph has been communicated through the Gestapo to all commissariats, to all prefectures, to all gendarmeries, to the various services of the *sureté*. I found this out through a policeman who is one of ours. He advises me to put up at his house. It is the safest shelter for the moment.

This policeman whom we call Leroux came into the resistance movement through a kind of shock, of revelation. Some ten months ago he was picked out, along with other inspectors of the French police, to assist in an operation of the Gestapo. Two cars brought the German and French agents to the Command Post of a network in which there was a transmitting station, a supply of arms and some ten people. The Gestapo agents directed the search. The French obeyed without a word. The policeman who is hiding me to-day wanted to open a bag which a young woman was holding. She threw it in his face, crying, "Boche, dirty Boche!" The young woman had a beautiful face, delicate and fragile but fearless. "I'm not a Boche," said the policeman in spite of himself. "Then you're even worse," said the young woman. "I felt as if I was going to pieces inside," Leroux explained, "and my eyes were all funny because of the tears."

It was then that he *saw* what was going on around him. They put handcuffs on an officer from the last war, whose blouse was full of decorations. The radio operator, an adolescent, had his face all smashed in by bludgeons because he had swallowed some papers. They were twisting a young girl's wrists to make her talk.

Leroux confined himself to mechanical movements during the rest of the search and when it was over he roamed through the town without knowing what he was doing. A friend accompanied him, another policeman who had also helped the Gestapo. This friend prevented him from committing suicide. "I would have done it," Leroux told me, "I would surely have done it. When I remembered what I had had a hand in for two years, without thinking, out of routine, when I thought of all the decent people, all the courageous women I had spied on, arrested, handed over to the Boches, I felt as if I was contaminated with a foul disease. . . . How I suffered!"

He shouted all this to his friend. The other understood, too. He said to Leroux, "It doesn't do any good to destroy yourself. You can try to make up for all that."

Each established contact with a different organisation through prisoners. They immediately gave such proofs of good faith to the resistance and took such risks that they were accepted. Leroux's friend, after doing magnificent work, was found out. He was obliged to go to England with some leaders of the resistance whom

he enabled to escape. Leroux continues to serve on our side. No one is so fanatically devoted.

\*

One thought that gives Leroux no rest is the fact that there should exist members of the French police whose ferocity is equal to that of the Germans. "I can't very well help," says Leroux, "excusing the inspectors who do their jobs as I did myself, from a sense of duty—without revulsion, but without pleasure. They obey Vichy, and the Marshal. They have not learned to think. But the others, those who are zealous, who work overtime, wholeheartedly, against the patriots. Those, goddam it . . . Those . . ."

And Leroux tells me about a chief inspector in Lyon who has put a razor edge on a spade-iron for prisoners who refuse to talk to be made to stand on barefoot. And he tells me about the "terrorist" brigade of Paris detailed to hunt out communists, the members of which are proud of having more imagination in inventing tortures than the Gestapo.

There is in Leroux more than a reaction of simple patriotism and of simple humanity against these people. There is the shame and anger that they should belong to the same profession as himself.

Yesterday he brought me a copy of "*France d'Abord*" the clandestine paper of the franc-tireurs and partisans—the F.T.P.—seized by the police and he read me the following note:

"In Beuvry, Pas de Calais, the police *commissaire* and several subordinates had arrested and tortured numerous compatriots and boasted of shooting the F.T.P.s on the spot. This called for revenge.

"On March the twenty-third the mayor of Beuvry, a friend of police *commissaire* Thery, found himself constrained to drive in his car a small group of franc-tireurs and partisans and bring them to the commissariat. The officers who tried to resist were knocked out. But the secretary succeeded in escaping. It was therefore not necessary to telephone the *commissaire* to call him. After half an hour two columns of policemen and gendarmes appeared along a row of houses heading toward the commissariat in front of which the F.T.P.s had taken up a battle position. Both sides opened fire. The *commissaire* succeeded in wounding a patriot. At this moment a burst from the group's sub-machine gun felled the

*commissaire*, and another brought down Sirven, the gendarmerie sergeant-major who killed a patriot last year.

"Their chiefs having been killed, some fifteen policemen and gendarmes fled in panic. The little F.T.P. group withdrew, carrying off nine revolvers and interesting papers found at the commissariat.

"Policemen sold to the Boches who arrest and torture patriots should know that the example of Beuvry will be followed."

I am sure no franc-tireur or partisan can have read this story with so much joy or with such a feeling of gratified vengeance as police inspector Leroux.

\*

Leroux's other torment is his inability to help all the comrades of the resistance with whom his duties bring him in contact: Gaullist girls thrown in with the most obscene prostitutes, thieves, murderesses, magnificent patriots, choice officers mixed with convicts and treated like them; lads who have been brave and strong and who are reduced by hunger and fever to the state of wrecks, who go mad in the cells. . . . People who on the mere request of the Germans are handed over for deportation, torture, the firing squad. And all of them look upon Leroux with suspicion, with disgust. But he must await our orders and can effect the escape of only one prisoner out of a hundred. And he must nevertheless justify himself in his job, be it ever so little. He is attached to the Gestapo. We need him in that post.

\*

There are occasionally compensations for Leroux. For instance, he has just listened for two hours to a German lecture on ways of detecting and preventing parachute landings. Well, he is going out to receive some parachutist to-night. A police car will bring back the British goods.

\*

Felix's widow and little Madeleine have been taken to room 87. They were undressed completely. A man and a woman of the Gestapo (a married couple, it is believed) questioned them while

sticking red-hot pins in their stomachs and under their nails. Felix's widow and Madeleine likewise underwent the torture of the dentist's drill which is sunk into the jaw-bone. They did not reveal anything. Between each of the tortures they sang the *Marseillaise*. This scene, which seems to be taken directly out of an absurd melodrama in the worst possible taste is put down in an official German report. Leroux has transmitted a copy to me. He has likewise informed me that the two women vowed they would not talk.

\*

This story has made a dreadful impression on Mathilde. Her face literally turned black. She keeps repeating endlessly, "If I don't get Madeleine out of this God will never forgive me." The thought that she persuaded Augustine to let her daughter go into the resistance movement is eating Mathilde's heart out. She does not think about Felix's widow. It's the features of the girl that haunt her. She is the same age as Mathilde's eldest daughter, whose gentle, regular features I have seen in a photograph.

\*

One of my friends has left for London. The Germans went to his house to conduct an investigation. They wanted to know where he was. They took his eleven-year-old son on the pretext that he had been carrying on Gaullist propaganda in his school. He was put against a white wall with a powerful spotlight pointed straight into his eyes, and was questioned for a whole night as to his father's whereabouts. All night the child repeated the same fable. His father knew another woman besides his mother and over this his parents constantly quarrelled. His mother had turned his father out of the house. "Because of these quarrels I've been badly brought up and talk bad in school," said the little boy against the white wall.

\*

Mathilde has committed an act of madness. She tried to rescue Madeleine by main force right out in the open street as she was being taken from the prison to be led once more to room 87.

Mathilde had with her the Bison, Jean-François and three men of the combat groups. They are all fanatically devoted to Mathilde. They came close to succeeding, but a charge of the S.S. broke their attack. They fell back. A chase through the streets. Our men took to the roofs. Gunplay from behind chimneys. Several Germans killed but they got two of ours. The Bison and another wounded were caught. Mathilde and Jean-François succeeded in escaping. Mathilde has only aggravated little Madeleine's situation, and for a mere liaison agent she has broken up a whole combat group. And we have lost the Bison.

\*

Leroux has showed me a clandestine paper which I did not know. It is a hostages' paper. It is called, "*Le Patriote du Camp de V.*," a little rag of a paper got out by hand. It has appeared four times. Each of the four numbers is in a different handwriting. There has been a lot of shooting at the Camp of V.

There are two poems in one of these numbers, written by a boy of nineteen, a worker. Between the writing of the two he was sentenced to death.

Here is the first:

*Goodbye, old comrade, goodbye  
You were just seventeen, but mere youth  
Stirs no pity in men so uncouth;  
Those killers doomed you to die.  
You were not afraid of death.  
With a brave, defiant glance,  
And a cry of "Long live France!"  
My comrade, you gave your last breath.  
The fire is gone from your eye  
And we who in prison remain  
To avenge you shall break loose again,  
Goodbye, old comrade, goodbye.*

Here is the second:

*All of us are communists  
And now for having shouted so  
Our names are on the sombre lists  
Of those who to the gallows go.*

*Oh you who are at liberty  
Oh you, our brothers in the fight,  
Ever beside you we shall be  
We shall not weaken in your sight.  
For us the final hour has tolled  
And death has called his crew,  
But we shall be avenged ten-fold:  
This task belongs to you.*

\*

Extract from the report of a group leader of the Franc-Tireurs and Partisans:

"A train that left the town of X every evening loaded with German soldiers on leave was called to our attention. After several reconnaissances it was decided to act. My seven men gathered together punctually in Bois Mesnil at eight in the evening.

"After each one had received his instructions we advanced by twos behind our scouts. On reaching the tracks, where all was calm, we set up the machine-gun on a butt overlooking the embankment and let the patrol pass.

"Thereupon I posted two watchers at a distance, in contact with us by means of a string laid on the ballast, to signal noiselessly in case of danger. Nine o'clock! With three men I began to unbolt one of the rails (our wrenches were carefully wound in rags this time) leaving four bolts in place to let the passenger train pass.

"The moment we sighted it we lay down. Then in the six minutes which remained before the passage of the Boche train we removed the last bolts, slipped the rail to the side and drove in some spikes to keep it out of alignment. We had finished just in time to go and take up our position on the embankment across from the sabotaged spot.

"At 9.35 the Boche train, going at good speed, derailed as anticipated. We directed a quick and steady fire with all our arms on the Boches coming out of the least demolished cars and fell back quickly by routes decided in advance for each group of two.

"We met no one, and the railway guards heard nothing of our work.

"There must have been sixty killed and hundreds of wounded.



All the men behaved splendidly, but number 7308 was given a reprimand for having lighted a cigarette while waiting for the passenger train."

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The leaders of all the interlinked organisations have decided to meet. The chief has asked me to come. Leroux begs me not to take this long trip. He says that my description has been sent out everywhere and that I head the list of those who are being sought. That was inevitable. I am the oldest of the surviving comrades.

To lead the Gestapo to the location of a transmitting station which has never existed, the Bison had himself driven at night along a route which we had reconnoitred in advance. A chain was stretched between two trees across the narrow road. The dimmed-out headlights failed to show it up in time. The car ran full speed against the chain. Mathilde and Jean-François cleaned out the Germans with tommy-guns. The Bison has a broken arm, but he will recover.

\*

I went to the meeting of the resistance leaders. Leroux accompanied me with a warrant. I was Leroux's prisoner. An ideal safe-conduct.

\*

In three stations we met convoys of men who had refused deportation.

These young men had handcuffs, irons on their feet and shaved heads. Some waved their chained hands and cried, "Volunteers! . . . Volunteers! . . ." Others sang the *Marseillaise* and beat out the tempo of the song with their shackles.

\*

The meeting lasted a long time. When it was concluded the chief said to me,

"There are fourteen of us here. Each one has risked his life in coming. I am not sure the practical results will justify this risk. But it makes no difference. Underground France has held a council

of war in defiance of the terror. That was worth while."

And Saint Luc (I don't know why I like to think of him by the name his brother gives him) also said,

"There are only fourteen of us, but how different we all are. Look at M. with his inspired, deeply lined face with a certain secret quality like that of Leonardo's faces. Look at B.'s violent neck and his eyes of passion. Look at the obstinate way in which J. sucks at his pipe. Look at R.'s hard, terrible hands. Look how timidly A. wipes his glasses. You have heard them speak. For some the sole object is the war against the Germans. Others already are thinking of the problems of classes and of post-war politics. And others are already thinking of Europe and dreams of world brotherhood. But everything has been discussed in a friendly spirit. That also was worth while." And Saint Luc said further,

"We are only fourteen, but we are borne up by thousands and probably by millions of men. To protect us combat groups are watching all the approaches that lead to this retreat, and will die before they let anyone get to us. Yet no one here feels pride or even a sense of power. We know that our soldiers change their names a hundred times and that they have neither a shelter nor a face. They move in secrecy, wearing shapeless shoes, on roads without sunlight and without glory. We know that this army is hungry and pure, that it is an army of shadows—the miraculous army of love and misfortune. And I have become conscious here of the fact that we are only the shadows of those shadows and the reflection of that love and that misfortune. That above all, Gerbier, was worth while."

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Back at Leroux's. I transmit the warning to newcomers who wish to enter the ranks of our organisation that they must not count on more than three months of freedom, that is to say of life. This will certainly not keep them out, but it is more honest.

## *A Wake in the Hitlerian Age*

**T**he German soldier stopped walking in the corridor and glued his helmeted face to the cut-out square in the door. Among the men condemned to die Gerbier alone noticed that fragment of metal, of flesh and of scrutiny which blocked the orifice. He was the only one not to conceive life as ended. He did not feel himself in a state of death.

The German soldier's eyes encountered those of Gerbier.

"He doesn't seem to be afraid," the soldier thought.

The other condemned were seated in a circle on the bare flagstones and were talking in low voices.

"Neither do they," the soldier reflected. "Yet this is the morning."

The soldier wondered for a moment how he would have behaved if he had known that he had only two hours to live. He wondered also what these men could have done. Then he yawned. It was a long watch. He might as well pace the hall till the execution. This was war, after all.

Gerbier brought his glance back to his comrades, whose feet were chained like his own. The barrack-room of the former French barracks had livid grey walls. The feeble electric light gave the same tinge to the condemned.

There were six of them besides Gerbier. The one who was speaking at the moment when Gerbier began to listen again with half an ear to their conversation had a pronounced Breton accent. His extreme youth was perceptible only in intonations that still held a childish freshness. But his face, simple in line and so lean that it seemed carved in boxwood, showed no trace of it. It was congealed in a kind of weighty incredulity. The protruding eyes bore the immobile expression of a man who has been wounded by images which he can no longer get rid of.

"It's the second time I am to be shot," said the lad. "The first wasn't the real one because I was only fifteen then. It was in

Brest on account of some machine-guns which a contingent of French soldiers leaving for England must have left. We didn't want them to get into the hands of the Germans. We buried them. A post-office employee betrayed us. He got a knife between the shoulders for it, but twelve of our boys older than myself were executed. Because of my age they changed the sentence at the last minute and I was sent to Germany as a civil prisoner. I never found out how long my sentence was. We lived, we croaked without knowing anything. During the thirty months I spent before escaping I didn't receive a single package, a single letter. At home they had no idea what had become of me. It affected my mother's mind, and she never got over it.

"In those civilian prisons there were all kinds. Austrians, Poles, Czechs, Serbs, and naturally a lot of Germans. We were hungry. . . . We were hungry! . . . To cut down their appetites the fellows would smoke bits of straw which they pulled out of their beds and rolled in a bit of newspaper. I had never smoked. I was forced to begin. . . . I was so hungry."

Gerbier handed his companions a half-full package of cigarettes. Each took one and each lit his except the oldest, a peasant with hair that was grey and hard as a boar's bristles. He put his cigarette behind his ear and said, "I'll keep it for later on." They understood that he meant the hour of the execution. The German soldier smelled the odour of the tobacco in the hall, but said nothing. It was he who had sold Gerbier his package of cigarettes.

"When we were caught smoking that straw we were punished with a stick—twenty-five blows," said the young Breton with the protruding eyes. "But as we were punished no matter what we did, for a mere nothing, we decided that a little more or a little less . . . and so we smoked just the same."

"It was the other prisoners who were made to do the punishing. They would bare your back and bring the stick down. The guards counted the blows. If the comrades didn't hit hard enough the guards would take their turn. As for the death penalties—and there were plenty of them . . . all the time—the system was the same. They would pick the friends, the best friends of the condemned, to do the job of hanging him. But he wasn't strung up as soon as he was condemned. In between days and often weeks would pass. . . . We never knew anything, as I said. The gallows

were there, in the yard, all ready. The condemned—they put a big black cross on their backs and on their knees—went right on working. Then one fine morning we were lined up in a square around the gallows and four comrades were made the executioners for some poor fellow. The other condemned with their black crosses would wait their turn without knowing which day it would be. You have to have looked into their eyes to understand. . . .

“Once it was a Pole who was hanged. His four friends, who were Poles too, before slipping the rope around his neck, got on their knees before him to ask forgiveness. He made the sign of the cross over them and they embraced. You have to have seen it to understand. . . .

“The bodies were thrown into a common grave and lime was poured over them. We always had to do it. There weren’t only the condemned to bury. . . . There were those who died of hunger, of disease. . . . And then there were those who could no longer live in this way. Those walked up to a sentry. The sentry would challenge them. They didn’t stop. Then the sentry would fire.”

The young Breton with the boxwood face sniffled. He had no handkerchief.

“But the worst thing that sticks in my mind isn’t the dead,” he said. “It was one evening when they made me change cells and I was put in with a poor old man whose hair and beard were all white. This old man, when he saw me, cringed in a corner and he put his hands in front of his face as if he thought I was going to hit him. I first thought he was mad. . . . There were many who went mad. . . . But no, he was in his right mind. Only he was a Jew. And so the Germans—the German prisoners, I mean (because I don’t need to mention the guards)—would beat him, pull him by his beard around the cell, they would knock his old white head against the walls. Prisoners doing that to another prisoner. . . . To a poor old man. . . .”

Gerbier’s neighbour gave a nervous start. He was small, dark, curly-haired, with darting melancholy eyes.

“A Jew,” thought Gerbier.

He did not know his companions. They had been brought together only for the last wake.

“So, when I escaped and after a few months they wanted to send me to work in Germany I defended myself with a knife,”

said the boy, who was eighteen, without changing his expression. "And here I am. . . . This time it's the real thing. . . . I'm old enough. . . ."

The peasant with the cigarette on his ear asked, "Have you bled many of them, son?"

"I haven't had time," said the Breton.

"Well, I've done my share," said the peasant. His lips, sprinkled with hard, grey hairs, curled up. He was not laughing, nor was he smiling. It was more like the movements of a hunting dog's chops expressing contentment. The peasant's teeth were black and solid.

"If I went to confession," he said, "I'd have to admit I didn't cook up the idea all by myself. Chance has been a good partner to me." The peasant winked his eye and rubbed his hands as though he were talking about a clever deal he might just have put over.

"My property is situated along a highway. Some Fritzes had their billets in the vicinity. Every day some of them came over to my place to ask if I had anything to drink. I sold it to them, and sold it high. . . . That was always so much to the good. . . . They only came one at a time because it was forbidden and they are always suspicious of their comrades. Then one evening along comes a non-com who's a little drunk and doesn't see the open trap-door to the cellar and falls in. My cellar is pretty deep . . . The Fritz had broken his neck all right. I went down and I found him dead. I didn't want any trouble and I buried him right in the cellar. . . . It may well have been that corpse that started my head working. . . . I can't be too sure, of course. But damned if a few days later the trap-door wasn't open again when a Fritz came in. He drank a glass too many, too, and he also fell in. . . . Only this time I helped him a little. So I buried him next to the first one. And then there was another, and still another. I kept count. It got up to nineteen. . . . At last I was going too fast. . . . I just couldn't control myself. That trap-door seemed to draw me. One Fritz disappearing every month might be passed off. But two and three a week, you've got to admit, is more than you can figure out. The Kommandatur started investigating. They finally looked in my cellar. And the bottom of my cellar, well, the bottom had climbed too high. There were three layers of Fritzes. So here I am. . . . I've done my share."

The peasant's lips once again went through the motions that recalled the expression of satisfied hunting dogs.

Gerbier thought, "We ought to get him into our combat groups." Then he thought almost simultaneously, "But he's going to be shot in a few minutes." And almost at the same time an inner voice said, "And so am I. . . ." But Gerbier did not recognise this voice. It was not his own. And he could not believe it.

Meanwhile a third condemned man was already speaking. Gerbier understood that each of them listened to his companions with indifference and only out of courtesy. Each had only one desire, one eagerness: to deliver the essential part of his being before dying.

"I've done my share too, in spite of the fact that I'm not twenty yet," said the condemned man who in turn had begun to speak. In him youthfulness burst forth in the fire of his voice, the life that animated his face and even in the little dark, tender moustache which must have grown in prison. With his bulging forehead and solid shoulders he looked like a young bullock.

"I'm a Lorrainese, from annexed Lorraine. I was taking courses at the University when the Boches announced that my class would be mobilised six months later in the German army. I didn't hesitate a second, you can imagine. I had time to spend Christmas at home and get away. We had a fine midnight supper. I don't know how my mother had managed to get hold of a goose. My father had brought out the last good bottles. I felt pretty blue about leaving them without telling them. At the end of the meal my father embraced me and led me to the door. He opened it. And he said to me, 'We know what your duty is.' My mother gave me a valise she had prepared and some money. In the morning I got across to the French frontier. At this moment I thought, 'Old man, with parents like that you're not going to be able to lead a quiet little life, and wait for victory to be won for you.' In Paris I tried to make myself useful. I knew a group of wonderful youngsters. I worked on a paper of independent opinion. I must tell you that I wanted to be a writer. Well, I was able to be one . . . and in an historic period such as there has never been. In a hundred years, in a thousand years, they will re-read those journals, you'll see. . . ."

Gerbier considered for a moment those cheeks coloured by a blood so vivid that it was stronger than the wretched light and

the livid grey reflections of the walls.

"The lad has temperament," thought Gerbier. "He must have written in '*L'Etudiant Patriote*' or in '*Les Lettres Françaises*.'"

Another condemned man was speaking. A man of very slender build and very delicate features. Although he was sitting with his legs crossed, his torso was perfectly straight, as in a cuirass. His eyes were luminous and his voice singularly clear.

"It's not a deliberate activity that has brought me among you, gentlemen," he said. "In spite of such feelings as I happened to have I did not dare to take a position against the Marshal. I was not sufficiently sure of my intelligence. My confessor—and I have always followed his advice—suggested that I wait until I saw things more clearly. I had a small chateau and some land. I had four children. I lived for them. No, I did not act, but I could not refuse asylum to the persecuted. I took in Englishmen and escaped prisoners, and fleeing patriots, and Jewish children."

The man beside Gerbier nervously shook his curly head.

"They arrested me finally. During the examination I was able to see my children. The children at first didn't recognise me. I was dirty. I had a week-old beard and I was already dressed like a highwayman. When I embraced them they were afraid. They looked to their mother to rescue them. Finally the oldest one, who was seven, and who went to a little girls' school, asked me, 'Papa, it's not true that you have done something very bad against the Marshal is it?' For the first time in my life I didn't know what to answer this child. In class they did everything to make them love the Marshal. And the Marshal kept me behind bars for two years in the former unoccupied zone and when the Germans occupied this zone, the Marshal handed me over to them. I have forgiven all my enemies. It is with reference to the Marshal that I have found it hardest to show myself a Christian."

The man with the lively, melancholy eyes seated beside Gerbier began to talk so fast that the words seemed to bump into one another. Gerbier wondered if it was due to a racial impatience or simply to the fact that time was pressing.

"I am a rabbi," said Gerbier's neighbour. "A rabbi in a large town. Because I am a rabbi, the Germans assigned me to the committee charged with identifying the Israelites who were unwilling to declare themselves. You follow me? . . . There are five people



on a committee of this kind . . . two Germans, two French Catholics and one French Israelite. I was the last of these. You follow me? Every week they brought before us men and women whom the occupation authorities suspected of being Israelites, and we had to say whether they were or not. An Israelite, and especially a rabbi, has a better chance than the next fellow to recognise his co-religionaries. You follow me? . . . The Germans certainly thought so. And they had forewarned me. The first time I said no when they could prove it was yes I would be shot. You follow me? . . . The trouble was that if I said yes the people were deported to Poland only to die there. A fine situation for a rabbi to be in. . . .”

The man beside Gerbier bowed his head toward the flagstones with a heartbroken and almost guilty expression. He sighed, “I always said no. . . . So here I am. . . .”

The sixth condemned man kept holding one hand pressed against the left side of his face. One eye was missing and the flesh on that side looked as if it had been scalded.

“I’m a communist, and an escaped prisoner besides,” he said. “When I got back I found neither my wife nor my sister nor their kids. Nobody knew anything. This is what had happened: My sister is married to a deputy in the party. He was in prison. My sister began to collect *sous* among the comrades to send him packages. One day she found out that the wife of another deputy was arrested for this crime. My sister never had very strong nerves. She lost her head. And as she was living together with my wife my wife went to pieces too. Then they went off to hide away somewhere. But they had no place to go. They were afraid of everybody. And also they didn’t want to get anybody into trouble. They finally found a deserted shack in the fields. They would go out only at night to look for potatoes which they dug out of the ground. And then they ate roots. They lived for months without bread, without heat, without clothes, without soap. And the kids too. Two of mine and one of my sister’s. When I finally managed to get hold of them they were a fine sight, I can tell you. . . . Now they’re all right, living with some comrades.”

The man suddenly clenched his teeth and growled, “God damned eye. . . . How it hurts. . . .”

He took a deep breath and continued in a strange, colourless voice, “And nobody will ever know what became of me. The

Gestapo wasn't able to identify me. I shall be shot under an assumed name."

The man turned instinctively toward Gerbier and the other imitated him. Gerbier was resolved to keep silent. He felt that he was not inwardly attuned to his companions. He had nothing to confide to them. And they had no curiosity about his confidence.

If they gave him a questioning look it was out of simple politeness. Yet Gerbier, too, spoke.

"I shouldn't want to start running, bye-and-bye," he said.

No one understood. Gerbier remembered that these condemned men were all isolated members of the resistance or strangers to the town.

"Here," said Gerbier, "they shoot prisoners with a machine-gun and on the run. I think they do it by way of training. . . . Unless it's an amusement. They let you go, you start running, you cover twenty, thirty metres. Then, fire. . . . It's a good exercise in firing at a moving target. I don't want to give them that pleasure."

Gerbier pulled out his package of cigarettes and distributed in halves the three that remained.

"No one will want to run," said the student.

"It doesn't do any good," said the peasant.

"And it's really losing face," said the landed proprietor.

The piece of helmet, of flesh and of scrutiny filled the opening in the door. The German soldier cried some words to Gerbier, "He asks us to hurry with our smoking," Gerbier translated. "They're coming for us in a moment. He doesn't want to get into any trouble."

"You take whatever trouble you can get," said the communist, shrugging his shoulders.

The student had become very pale. The landed proprietor crossed himself. The rabbi began to mutter Hebraic verses.

"This time it's the real thing," said the eighteen-year-old Breton.

Gerbier gave a half-smile. The peasant slowly reached for the cigarette behind his ear. . . .

## *The Rifle Range*

The central part of the old barracks communicated with the rifle range by means of a very long vaulted corridor. The seven condemned men entered it one by one, flanked by soldiers of an S.S. unit. Gerbier found himself approximately in the middle of the line. The student was in the lead and the peasant came last. The condemned men advanced slowly. They still carried the shackles on their feet. The corridor had no outside openings. Electric globes at regular intervals filled it with a confused light. The shadows of the condemned men and those of their armed guards formed a gigantic and vacillating escort on the walls. In the resounding silence of the hallway the booted tread of the soldiers made a deep, heavy sound, to which was added the clanking of the chains of the condemned men and the scraping of their shackles.

"It composes a kind of symphony," said Gerbier to himself. "I wish the chief could hear it."

Gerbier remembered the expression that had come over Luc Jardie's face when he spoke about music. And Gerbier was almost dazzled to come upon this face in the vaulted corridor. The chains clanked. The irons scraped.

"It's really curious," said Gerbier to himself. "Our shackles make me think of the chief. But for them . . . perhaps . . ."

And suddenly Gerbier thought,

"I'm an idiot."

He had just realised that any image and any sensation at that moment would have brought him back to Luc Jardie by an unforeseen and inevitable detour.

"The word 'love' has meaning for me only when it applies to the chief. He means more to me than anything," said Gerbier to himself. But it was then that an answer came to him from his viscera, "More than anything and less than life."

The shadows danced, the shackles groaned.

"Saint Luc is what I love most in life, but Saint Luc could disappear and I should still want to live.

"And I am going to die . . . and I am not afraid. It's impossible not to be afraid when one is going to die. . . . It is because I am too limited, too much of an animal to believe it. But if I don't believe it till the last moment, till the ultimate limit, I shall never die. . . . What a discovery! And how it would appeal to the chief. I must go into this more deeply. . . . I must . . ."

At this point Gerbier's flashing meditation was broken off abruptly. At the first moment he did not understand the cause of this cessation. Then he heard a song that filled the whole sound-volume of the corridor. Then he recognised this song. The *Marseillaise*. The student had begun it. The others had immediately taken it up. The student, the rabbi, and the worker had fine voices, full and impassioned. It was they that Gerbier heard best. But he did not want to listen to them. He wanted to think. These voices hindered him. And above all, he did not want to sing.

"The *Marseillaise*. . . . It's always done in situations like this," said Gerbier to himself. For a moment he rediscovered his half-smile.

The line of the condemned men advanced slowly. The song passed over Gerbier without touching him.

"They don't want to think, and I do . . ." he said to himself. And with savage impatience he waited for the familiar stanzas to spend themselves. The corridor was long.

"I shall still have some time to myself," Gerbier decided. The *Marseillaise* came to an end.

"Quick, quick, I must explore my discovery," thought Gerbier. But the student's strong, pure voice rose again. And this time Gerbier felt himself caught and tightly held within as by a magic hand. The *Chant du Départ* had always had this effect on him. Gerbier was responsive to its accents, to its words. He stiffened. He did not want to do like the others. He had an essential problem to solve. Yet he felt the melody surge within his chest. He clenched his teeth. His companions were singing. . . .

" *Un Français doit vivre pour elle. . . .*  
*Pour elle un Français doit mourir . . .*"

Gerbier clenched his teeth harder because these verses were

already singing in his throat. Was he going to let himself be carried away?

"I won't yield. . . . I won't yield. . ." Gerbier said to himself. "It's the mob instinct. I don't want to sing, just as I don't want to run before the machine-guns."

This association helped Gerbier to hold back the song that was ready to burst from him. He had the feeling of having surmounted an inner danger.

The shackled line at last reached a little door contrived in the thickness of the wall on the left. The shadows stopped dancing. The scraping of the chains ceased. And also the song. A sentry opened the door. A natural light spread across a section of the corridor. The student again took up the strains of the *Marseillaise* and the condemned men, one after another, entered the enclosure of their death.

It was a stereotyped military rifle range. A bare rectangle enclosed by rather high walls. Against the back wall and separated from it by a narrow space, one saw the stop-butt for the targets. A few shreds of cloth and of paper quivered on its slopes in the sharp morning breeze. The light was sharp and melancholy. One by one the condemned men stopped singing. They had just perceived a few paces away six campaign machine-guns. An S.S. lieutenant, very lean, with a metallic face, who was in command of the firing squad, looked at his watch.

"Boche punctuality," growled the communist worker.

- The student took a deep breath of fresh air and tugged at his little moustache.

"I won't run. . . . I won't . . ." Gerbier kept saying to himself.

The others, as if fascinated, did not avert their eyes from the lieutenant. He shouted an order. Some soldiers advanced with keys and undid the locks that held the prisoners' shackles. The irons fell to the ground with a muffled sound. Gerbier thrilled to feel himself suddenly so light. He had the impression that his legs were all new and young, that he must try them out without delay, that they demanded space, that they were going to carry him away at a winged pace. Gerbier looked at his companions. Their muscles were agitated by the same impatience. The student especially could barely control himself. Gerbier looked at the S.S. officer,

who was tapping a cigarette on his right thumb. He had green, expressionless eyes.

"He knows very well what my legs want," Gerbier suddenly reflected. "He's getting ready for the show."

And Gerbier felt himself more securely chained by the assurance of this man than he had been by his irons. The officer looked at his watch and addressed the condemned men in very distinct French.

"In one minute you will go and stand with your backs to the machine-guns and facing the stop-butt," he said. "You will run as fast as you can. We shall not fire immediately. We shall give you a chance. Those who get behind the butt will be executed later, with the next batch."

The officer had spoken with a strong, mechanical voice, as if announcing the routine of a manoeuvre. Having finished, he lit his cigarette.

"We can always try. . . . We've got nothing to lose," said the peasant to the rabbi.

The latter did not answer, but his eyes avidly gauged the distance that separated him from the stop-butt. With the same unawareness the student and the young Breton were doing likewise.

The soldiers aligned the seven men as the officer had ordered. And no longer seeing the machine-guns, feeling their muzzles at his back, Gerbier was seized with a strange contraction. A spring within him seemed to be impelling him forward.

"Go . . ." said the S.S. lieutenant.

The student, the rabbi, the young Breton, the peasant set off immediately. The communist, Gerbier and the land-owner did not stir. But they had the impression of balancing back and forth as if they were struggling to maintain their equilibrium between two opposing forces.

"I won't . . . I won't run . . ." Gerbier repeated to himself.

The lieutenant with his revolver fired three bullets that sped past Gerbier's and his companions' cheeks. And the equilibrium was broken. . . . The three condemned men followed their comrades.

Gerbier had no sense of advancing of his own accord. The spring he had felt being wound inside him had been released and

was hurtling him straight forward. He could still reflect. And he knew that this race that was bringing him toward the stop-butt served no purpose. No one had ever come back alive from the rifle range. There were not even wounded. The machine-gunners knew their job. .

Bullets hummed above his head, against his flanks.

"Idle bullets," said Gerbier to himself. "Crack shots. . . To make us run faster. . . Waiting for a more meritorious distance. . . . Grotesque to wear ourselves out." And yet at each whistling that passed close to him Gerbier lengthened his stride. His mind became muddled. His body was getting the better of his mind. Soon he would be only a hare maddened by fear. He would not allow himself to look at the butt. He wanted none of that hope. To look at the butt was to look at death, and he did not feel himself in a state of death. . . . As long as one thinks one cannot die. But the body was winning . . . still winning over thought. Gerbier remembered how this body, in spite of himself, had relaxed in London, at the Ritz Hotel. . . . Bright points of candlelight flickered before his eyes. . . . The dinner at the home of the old lady with the chief. The points of candlelight burned, burned, like sharp suns.

Then there was darkness. A wave of thick, black smoke swept from one end of the rifle range to the other across its whole width. A dark curtain had fallen. Gerbier's arms hummed so violently that he did not hear the explosions of the smoke-shells. But because his mind had not quite reached the breaking point he understood that this deep fog was intended for him. And as he was the only one who had never accepted the state of death he was the only one to utilise the screen of fog.

The other condemned men stopped short. They had abandoned themselves to their muscles for a last game. The moment the game ceased, their muscles no longer carried them. Gerbier summoned all his reserves of wind and muscle. Now he no longer thought at all. The bursts of machine-gun bullets followed him, the bursts surrounded him, but the gunners now could fire only at random. A bullet tore a shred of flesh from his arm. Another burned his thigh. He ran faster. He passed beyond the butt. Behind was the wall. And on that wall, Gerbier saw . . . yes, there was no doubt of it . . . a rope.

Without using his feet, without feeling that he was pulling himself up with the strength of his wrists like a gymnast, Gerbier reached the crest of the wall. A few hundred metres away he saw . . . yes, there was no doubt of it . . . a car. He jumped . . . he flew. . . . The Bison was waiting for him, the motor was running, the car started off. Inside were Mathilde and Jean-François.

The Bison drove very well, very fast. Gerbier was talking, and so were Jean-François and Mathilde. Jean-François was saying that it wasn't difficult. He had always been a good grenade thrower in the reconnaissance corps. The important thing was to time the action accurately as Mathilde had done. And Mathilde was saying that it was easy with the instructions they had received.

Gerbier listened, answered. But all this was only superficial. Without value. One single question, a capital question obsessed his mind.

"And what if I hadn't run? . . ."

Jean-François asked him,

"Something wrong? The comrades who were left behind?"

"No," said Gerbier.

He was not thinking of his companions. He was thinking of the lieutenant's metallic face and of his expressionless eyes when he was tapping his cigarette on his thumbnail, and of the fact that he was so sure he would make Gerbier run like the rest—like a frantic rabbit.

"I'm disgusted with living," Gerbier suddenly said.

The car crossed a bridge, then a wood. But Gerbier still saw the face of the S.S. officer, the cigarette, the thumbnail. He felt like groaning.

Until then Gerbier had been convinced that he detested the Germans with a fullness so perfect that it could not be increased by anything that might be added to it; convinced, likewise, of having exhausted all the sources of a hatred which he cherished. Now he suddenly felt himself devoured by a fury that he had not yet known and that exceeded and renewed all the others. But sticky and unhealthy and ashamed of itself. The fury of humiliation. . . .

"He has befouled my hatred . . ." thought Gerbier despairingly.



His torment must have encroached upon his face, for Mathilde made a movement of which she appeared incapable. She took one of Gerbier's hands and held it in hers for a moment. Gerbier seemed not to notice this gesture. But he was more grateful to Mathilde for this than for having saved his life.

## *Mathilde's Daughter*

**T**he little house had been uninhabited for a long time. It was in no way distinguishable from the bungalows built around it that were squeezed together on a low-class real-estate development. It was only damper than the others because its narrow garden adjoined a marshy ground behind it. This was the way by which Gerbier arrived with the Bison in the night that followed the adventure of the rifle range. Gerbier carried a valise which contained filing cards and documents. The Bison had a sack full of provisions. When the two men entered the house noiselessly they were struck by the mouldy smell.

"Nothing pretty about security," said the Bison.

He put down his sack in the kitchen and went off. Gerbier carefully shut the door which led from the garden to the mouldy little house.

For three months he had not been out of it.

The shutters had remained closed. The front door that led to the road had never been opened. Gerbier had never lit the fire (luckily it was an early spring). He had never used the electric light, so as not to increase the figures on the meter. He worked by the light of a carefully shaded carbide lamp. He ate cold food. Once a week, together with the mail, he had been brought bread and such canned goods as could be found on the black market. The dates and the hours of these visits were fixed in advance.

Aside from them Gerbier had no communication with the outside world to hope for. The chief had ordered the most extreme prudence. Gerbier's pictures were published and posted everywhere. The Gestapo had promised an enormous reward to informers.

When the nights were very dark Gerbier would go into the garden. But he spent only a few moments there. A dog would bark, a door would bang in some adjoining house, and Gerbier would go indoors again.

He had lived three months without letting a spark of life filter through.

## II

Midnight was approaching. Gerbier, with his shoes off, went from one to the other of the two rooms that constituted the house. The carbide lamp lighted just a section of the table on which papers lay: plans, messages, notes. The mail was ready. Gerbier no longer knew what to do. He walked back and forth a little longer. Then he shrugged his shoulders, picked up a pack of cards and began a game of patience.

A key turned very softly in the lock of the door that led to the garden. Gerbier stopped his patience but left the cards in place so that he could continue the game later. He shut his eyes.

"The Bison, or Jean-François?" he wondered. "If it's the Bison the news will be . . ." Gerbier's dry, hard lips contracted, and he wrinkled his brow as a man does when he is struggling with a mental anguish.

"I'm getting stupid," Gerbier murmured.

The door to the vestibule was pushed open noiselessly and a figure was outlined on the threshold. Although that part of the room was steeped in darkness, Gerbier saw immediately that the figure was neither that of Jean-François nor that of the Bison. The man was not so tall as they. He had long hair and his back was slightly stooped. Gerbier got up but did not dare move forward. The man laughed—a naive, tender, almost silent laugh.

"It's . . . it's you . . . Chief?" Gerbier whispered incredulously.

Luc Jardie drew close to the table and each step seemed progressively to form his face. Gerbier put his hands on Jardie's shoulders and gazed at him without blinking.

"I wanted to talk with you a little," said Luc Jardie. "Little brother Jean showed me the way. He's standing guard outside."

Gerbier continued to hold Jardie by the shoulders and his fingers caressed the worn material of the coat.

"His jaws and eyes are still firm," thought Jardie. "But he can no longer make his half-smile."

Gerbier said at last,

"The last place where I saw you, Chief, was right on the rifle range. I saw you among candles. You remember, the dinner by candlelight when we were in London? I was running. . . . Because I ran like the rest, you know. . . . I didn't want to sing as they did because I had found a solution to death and I was thinking of you. I didn't sing, but I ran. . . . It's lamentable. . . ."

"I don't think it's lamentable to be a man," said Jardie laughing.

Gerbier appeared not to hear him. He let his arms drop and continued,

"At the questionings, though, I had managed to hold on to myself. It's true that I wasn't too badly handled. I think they can sense matter that is not very vulnerable. Unless there is a sign people carry around with them. Certain ones who use the most extreme precautions are caught. And others, like the Bison or your brother, always escape. . . . They have the sign. . . ."

Luc Jardie turned his gaze toward the patience cards laid out on the table.

"I know. . . . I know. . . ." said Gerbier.

He again rubbed his forehead and suddenly mixed up the cards.

"At times I think prison was less stifling," he said. "There were my answers to calculate. I looked for means of escape. I listened to the others. I spoke to the guards. Here I live in a tiny padded world. A wet, dark padding. Images and thoughts go round in circles. There is the obsession of losing contact. I remember a communist in prison. Not the one in the rifle range. Another one. He had been in hiding for a long time as I am. The comrade, the only one he saw, was taken. No more contact for weeks. It was worse than anything, he said. I know that with us the partitioning is not so rigorous. I have thought a great deal about the discipline of the communists. . . ."

"Gerbier, I should like to know one thing," Jardie asked in a

friendly tone. "Is it solitude that makes you talk so much and so fast? Or do you want to avoid our thinking of Mathilde? . . ."

### III

Jean-François was crouching, invisible and motionless, against the wall of the small house. Within, his brother was carrying out a task unknown to him. His brother. . . .

"What's the matter? Why isn't it the same any more?" Jean-François wondered. "Who has changed? He or I? . . ."

Jean-François thought of his comrades—hunted, imprisoned, disfigured, strangled, shot. And he also thought of the wonderful successes, the sabotages, the raids, the newspapers distributed by thousands, the liaisons with London, the parachutings, the embarkations, the miracles of the underground host to which he belonged, that martyred and victorious host. Everything had had its source and everything continued to be organised in the little mansion in the Rue de la Muette, with its harpsichord, its old woman-servant and the brother about whom Jean-François had always known that he was defenceless, touching and a little comical. For Jean-François he could not be the Chief. But he could no longer be Saint Luc.

Jean-François no longer knew what name to give to the man whom he had just led to the little house.

### IV

"We must talk of Mathilde to-night," said Luc Jardie.

Gerbier threw his head back, as though he were too close both to Jardie and to the narrow circle of light which came from the shaded lamp.

"We must," Jardie repeated softly.

"What for?" asked Gerbier in a curt, almost hostile voice. "There is nothing to say for the moment, I am waiting for news. The mail is bound to be here soon."

Luc Jardie sat down near the lamp. Gerbier likewise sat down, but beyond the area of light. Without his being aware of it his fingers were breaking the corner of one of the cards he had scrambled. Then he looked for a cigarette, but he had run out of

them. He always used up his supply before the next mail came.

"News will be welcome," said Luc Jardie. "But I should like before it comes to review with you the elements of the problem as we used to do in the old days for less human questions. Do you remember?"

Gerbier remembered. . . . Jardie's book. . . . The little mansion in the Rue de la Muette. . . . The shared meditations. The lessons of knowledge, of wisdom.

Beneath the muffled lamp, in the mouldy room, Jardie's face was the same as it had been then. That youthful smile and those white wisps of hair. The line of the forehead, The pensive and chimerical eyes.

"As you wish, Chief," said Gerbier. He felt himself once more free in mind and capable of considering everything with serenity.

"You talk first," Jardie said.

"The facts are as follows," said Gerbier. "Mathilde was caught on the 27/8th May. No harm was done her. She found a way of letting us know this very quickly. And also that she was closely guarded. Then we learned that the Germans were investigating Mathilde's past. The Gestapo had no difficulty finding the anthropometric card drawn up after her first arrest. The Germans know Mathilde's real name and her family's address. The Gestapo raided the Porte d'Orleans house and took the eldest daughter.

Luc Jardie had bowed his head slightly and rolled round his fingers some light and curly white strands that were close to his temples. Not encountering his gaze, Gerbier stopped talking. Jardie looked up but continued to toy with his hair.

"Yes," said Gerbier. "That's the only mistake Mathilde made from the point of view of her own safety. She kept about her that picture of her children. She thought she had hidden it so that no one could find it. The women attendants of the Gestapo found it. The Germans felt right away that this was the weak point in that woman without nerves. All the more so as Mathilde, the Mathilde we know, began to beg them to let her keep the photograph. It's unbelievable. . . ."

"It's wonderful," said Jardie.

Then he asked,

"Have you seen the photograph?"

"Mathilde showed it to me once," said Gerbier. "Some insignificant children, and a girl without much expression, but fresh, gentle, cleancut."

Gerbier stopped again.

"Well?" Jardie asked.

"We received an S.O.S. from Mathilde," said Gerbier in a lower voice. "The Germans gave her the choice: Either she would hand over to them all the important people she knew among us, or else her daughter would be sent to Poland to a house of prostitution for soldiers returning from the Russian front."

Gerbier again looked in vain for a cigarette. Jardie stopped playing with his hair, put his hands flat on his knees and said,

"Such are the data of the problem. I've come to find the solution."

Gerbier again broke a corner of a card and then of another.

"Mathilde may escape."

Jardie shook his head.

"Do you know anything?" asked Gerbier.

"I know nothing except that she *can not* escape, and neither can she kill herself. The Gestapo isn't worried. The girl is answerable for everything."

"Mathilde can gain time," said Gerbier without looking at Jardie.

"How much time?" the latter asked.

Gerbier did not answer. He felt an excruciating need to smoke.

"The mail will never arrive to-night," he said furiously.

"Are you impatient for news of Mathilde or for a cigarette?" asked Jardie with kindness.

Gerbier abruptly stood up and burst out,

"When I think of this woman, what she was, what she has done, and what she has been reduced to . . . I can't think any more. . . . I . . . Oh, the bastards, the bastards. . . ."

"Not so loud, Gerbier," said Jardie, "the house is uninhabited."

He took Gerbier gently by the wrist and made him sit down again.

## V

Jean-François felt, rather than saw or heard, the Bison approach.

"Guillaume," Jean-François whispered, "don't go in right

away, we have to wait for a signal."

The Bison came and crouched against the wall, near Jean-François.

"How is everything?" the young man whispered in his ear.

"So-so," said the Bison.

## VI

Gerbier had rested both elbows on the table and his chin in the hollow of his joined hands. It seemed to him that in this way he was imprisoning the fury that stopped his throat and jammed his lower jaw. He looked for a long time, fixedly, at Jardie's lighted face. He asked,

"How, tell me, how can you help trembling with hatred for those bastards? When you hear a story like that of Mathilde's daughter do you really not have for a single moment a desire to exterminate that whole people, to trample it underfoot, to . . ."

"No, Gerbier, really not," said Luc Jardie. "Just think it over for a moment. A new episode, however frightful, surely isn't going to influence the general feeling one may have about men. Something more or less cannot change a metaphysical conception. Everything that we have undertaken has been done in order to remain men of free thought. Hatred is a shackle to free thought. I do not accept hatred."

Jardie began to laugh and it seemed as though his face rather than the lamp had become the centre of light in the room.

"I am cheating right now," Jardie went on. "What I have just told you is a construction of the mind—and a construction of the mind is always intended to justify an organic feeling. The truth is that I love men: that's all there is to it. And if I have got myself mixed up in all this business it's only against the inhuman part that exists in some of them."

Jardie laughed again.

"You know," he said, "I sometimes feel a homicidal urge when I hear Mozart or Beethoven being massacred! Is that hatred?"

He rolled a white strand round a finger.

"I remember a fright I had in the *métro*," said Jardie pensively. "A man came and sat next to me. He had a small goatee, a deformed shoulder and dark glasses. He began to look at me through these

glasses with a strange insistence. I had never been bothered by the police. You were the only one to know both my real activity and my true identity. But just the same I was afraid. You never know. From time to time I would look up and I would always encounter that look. Then once the man winked at me. And I recognised Thomas, my dear Thomas, you know, the physicist, my teacher at the Sorbonne who was later executed. Yes, yes, Thomas admirably disguised. I had an impulse to go and throw my arms around him, but he raised one finger and I understood that I must not recognise him. So we remained there face to face looking at each other. From time to time he would wink at me from behind his dark glasses. Then he got off at a station. And I never saw him again."

Jardie let his hands fall on his knees and half closed his eyelids. "It's the first wink that has remained in my memory," he continued. "That wink which re-established everything between two men. I have often dreamt that some day I might give a German such a wink."

"And I remember," said Gerbier, furiously clenching his jaw, "I remember the look of the last German I saw . . ."

"Well?" said Jardie.

"They were snake-skin eyes," said Gerbier. "The eyes of the S.S. who forced me to run. I swear to you that if you had been in my place . . ."

"Why, in your place, old man, I would not have hesitated a second," Jardie exclaimed, "I would have run like a rabbit, like a poor rabbit, and without any kind of shame, and I would not have seen my chief, as you did, nor the London candles. I would have been so afraid . . ."

Jardie began to laugh with a silent fullness which brought his face back to adolescence. Then he said seriously,

"You have no idea, Gerbier, how wonderful you are."

Gerbier began to pace the room.

"And here we are miles away from the solution to our problem," said Jardie suddenly.

"It depends on the mail," said Gerbier.

"The Bison must have arrived, but I wanted to talk to you at some length," said Jardie.

Gerbier went toward the vestibule.



"It's unnecessary for the Bison to know that I'm here," said Jardie. He passed into the adjoining room and closed the door softly.

## VII

The Bison entered, and Jean-François behind him. The Bison gave Gerbier a package of cigarettes.

"I'll bet you want one," he said.

Gerbier did not answer. His hands shook a little as he tore open the blue paper wrapping. He took several deep puffs with a famished avidity. Then he asked, "What about Mathilde?"

The Bison who had watched Gerbier smoke with a kind of friendly and crude complicity spread over his whole massive face suddenly became stony.

"Well?" Gerbier asked impatiently.

"I don't know anything," said the Bison.

"What about your squad of informers?" Gerbier asked.

The Bison dropped his head a little and his narrow, deeply lined forehead became more prominent.

"I don't know anything," he said.

Gerbier tried to catch his eye, but did not succeed.

The Bison put his fist under his smashed nose and said between his teeth and between his clenched fingers,

"I don't know anything. Everything is in the mail."

From a secret pocket he pulled out sheets of onion-skin paper covered with a fine writing in code. Gerbier lit a cigarette from the one which was beginning to burn his lips and got to work. Jean-François and the Bison stood silently in the shadow. This lasted a long time. Finally Gerbier looked up. His head was exactly under the lamp.

The circle of light accentuated in a strange way the suddenly sharpened features of his face.

"Mathilde was freed the day before yesterday and Gerbonnel, Arnaud and Roux have been arrested," said Gerbier.

Gerbier turned toward the Bison and asked him,

"Is that right?"

"Well, if it's in the report," said the Bison.

His voice was even more husky than usual.

Gerbier turned toward Jean-François.

"You knew it . . . ?" he asked.

"I wasn't in charge of the report," said Jean-François.

Gerbier felt that these two men, the most faithful, the most trustworthy, the hardest, were being evasive. And he felt that in their place he would have had the same attitude. It was precisely because of this that he was suddenly freed from all inner struggle from all scruple and all pity. He said to the Bison, bluntly and in a tone which always commanded obedience,

"Mathilde is to be liquidated, immediately, and by whatever means . . ."

"It isn't true," said the Bison. He shook his low forehead and continued in one breath,

"No, I won't touch Madame Mathilde. I've worked with her. She's saved my neck. I've seen her clean the Gestapo with a tommy-gun. She's a great woman. Men, when it's necessary . . . anything you say. . . . But Madame Mathilde, as long as I'm alive . . . never!"

Gerbier lit another cigarette and said,

"There's nothing to argue about, she's got to go. She's going to go . . ."

"You won't do it," said the Bison.

"We've got other killers besides you," said Gerbier, shrugging his shoulders. "And if it comes to that, I'll do it myself. . . ."

"You won't do it," the Bison whispered, "you have no right, I tell you. On the rifle range you could have run like a champion, and you'd still be in the common grave right now if it hadn't been for Madame Mathilde who thought up the business of the smoke-bombs."

Gerbier's face lost all expression. The Bison drew close to Gerbier. His terrifying hulk emerged from the shadow.

"You won't do it," he said. "Let her sell us all out if she wants to. She's saved me. She's saved you. Now she's saving her daughter. It's not up to us to judge her."

The Bison was speaking very low. His voice was dangerously appealing.

"That'll do . . ." said Gerbier. "The matter is settled. Since you won't do it, I'll put a note in the mail."

The Bison spoke in an even lower voice.

"If you're coward enough to try it, I'll get you first," he said.

Gerbier began to write.

Near him, under the lamp, the Bison's face assumed such an expression that Jean-François seized him by the wrist.

"You wouldn't touch a chief," he whispered.

"Get out," said the Bison, "and get out quick. You're not going to tell me anything. You were still playing marbles when I was already commanding men in the legion. Get out of my sight, I tell you. . . . Or I'll take care of both of you."

Jean-François knew the Bison's muscular strength. He drew back and pulled out his rubber bludgeon. Gerbier's hand, in the table drawer, had found his revolver.

## VIII

"I think what is needed is a man who knows nothing about weapons in this uninhabited house," said Luc Jardie.

Gerbier did not turn round. Jean-François by a reflex came and stood beside his brother. The Bison retreated into the shadow. He had seen Jardie only once, but he knew that he was the chief.

"My friend, sit down," Jardie said to him. "And you too," he said to Jean-François.

Jardie took a chair and added,

"And light a cigarette. It makes you feel better, they tell me. Isn't that so, Gerbier?"

The latter at last turned round.

"Did you hear everything?" he asked.

Jardie did not answer and addressed the Bison:

"You're right," he said. "Mathilde is a wonderful woman. Even more wonderful than you think. . . . But we're going to kill her."

The Bison muttered, "It isn't possible."

"Why yes, why yes . . ." said Jardie. "You'll see, my friend. We're going to kill Mathilde because she begs us to."

"Did she tell you that?" the Bison asked eagerly.

"No, but it's obvious," said Jardie. "Just think a moment. If Mathilde had simply wanted to save her daughter all she had to do was to hand over a list of names and addresses. You know what a memory she has. . . ."

"It's astounding," said the Bison.

"All right," said Jardie. "Instead of doing that Mathilde tells

them that our people are constantly changing addresses. . . . That she has to re-establish contacts—anything. In other words, she gets herself set free. Isn't it clear enough?"

The Bison did not answer. He swung his head from right to left and from left to right.

"Suppose you were in Mathilde's place—that you were OBLIGED to hand your friends over, and were not allowed to commit suicide . . ."

"I'd want to be put out of the way, that's true," said the Bison slowly.

"Well then, you think you are braver and better than Mathilde?" he asked.

The Bison became very red.

"You must forgive me, Chief," he said.

"All right," said Jardie. "You'll get hold of a German car, little Jean will drive, and I'll be with you in the back seat."

Gerbier made a move so violent that the lamp shook.

"Chief, what is this madness?" he asked drily.

"I'm sure Mathilde will be glad to see me," said Jardie.

Jean-François murmured.

"I beg you, it isn't your place, Saint Luc."

Because his brother had rediscovered his old nickname Jardie put his hand on his shoulder and said laughing, with even more friendliness than usual,

"It's an order."

"That wasn't necessary, Chief."

Gerbier wrote out his messages and the Bison took them and left. Jardie motioned to his brother to withdraw.

## IX

"Are you sure of what you claim about Mathilde?" asked Gerbier.

"How can I tell . . ." said Jardie.

He twirled a white strand between his fingers.

"It's possible that this hypothesis may be correct," he went on. "It's possible, too, that Mathilde may have wanted to see her children again and that it has become more difficult for her to die. . . . That's what I want to find out."

Gerbier shuddered and said in a bare whisper,  
"You, in that car of killers. . . . There's nothing sacred left  
in this world."

He did not even think of hiding the quivering of his lower  
jaw.

"I've stayed with you for what was most important," said  
Jardie. "London asks for a man from our movement for some  
consultations. You will be in on the first trip."

Gerbier broke the corner of a card.

"Is that a furlough of convalescence?" he asked.

Jardie laughed and said,

"You still don't want to run, Gerbier?"

"Oh, this time I don't mind," said Gerbier.

He felt a wretched and all-powerful joy circulate through his  
body.

## X

When Mathilde saw the car of killers approach her Jardie could  
make out nothing from her face.

The Bison fired as he always did, without missing.  
And Jean-François managed to elude pursuers.

## XI

Gerbier spent three weeks in London.

He left again for France in good health and very calm.

He had recovered the use of his half-smile.

*Coulsdon, Ashdown Park Hotel*  
September 2, 1943





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